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Theme Issue
The Exemplary Schools Project

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The Alberta Journal of Educational Research

Volume XLII, Number 3, September 1996

Theme Issue
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Abstract of approximately 100 words on a separate sheet.

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The Alberta Journal of Educational Research *Vol. XLII, No. 3, September 1996, 193-194*

Jane Gaskell
University of British Columbia

and

David MacKinnon
Acadia University

Editorial

Canada has produced few large-scale educational studies with policy relevance, unlike other countries where educational research is directly funded and linked, if only rhetorically and uncertainly, to policy. The jealously guarded provincial jurisdiction of education in this country and the lack of a national educational research agency are undoubtedly part of the problem. The relatively new status of educational research in our universities and the ready availability and high profile of United States researchers across the border have also militated against the Canadian educational research community coming together around the issues facing Canadian schools.

The Exemplary Schools study marks an important departure from this norm. It was explicitly aimed at bringing a substantial number of researchers from all regions of the country together with policymakers and practitioners, and at strengthening the national research effort in education. It came into existence because education was on the federal government's policy agenda in the early 1990s in a way it had not been for years, and the Department of Employment and Immigration (which became the Department of Human Resources Development during the time frame of this study) had some money for research. Discussions of global competitiveness and the presence of high unemployment, especially for young people, have put new pressure on formal education. The federal government's Prosperity Initiative and the Economic Council of Canada's "A Lot to Learn" report created a political climate where education had a national profile.

This issue of *AJER* appears at another, later moment when the notion of the Canadian nation seems more tenuous than it has for a long time, and finding funds for research is increasingly difficult. In this issue we provide some sense of what was accomplished and hope to entice you to read further to the case studies and the national report.

The articles collected in this volume are based on the school reports; they draw out the lessons that schools, responding to their individual contexts, have to offer others. They all deal with the complex and often difficult relations between a local school community and its surrounding provincial or board context. *Qitiqliq* is a school in the Northwest Territories where the local Inuk culture and language are both affirmed and challenged, reflecting the importance of the local and the dominance of the south. *Grandy's River* has strong local support, but like many outport schools is at risk of being closed as the province looks for places to cut spending by consolidating. *New Norway* is a small rural school that has so far avoided being closed or consolidated by being extraordinarily attentive and responsive to students and parents. Even though its enrollment was very low a few years ago, today it attracts more students than it can comfortably handle in its building. *Paincourt* becomes the focus of the local community's defense of French culture and language in a milieu that is anglophone in both the immediate surroundings and the larger province. At *Vanier* demands for accountability from the school board contribute to the tensions between those teachers who work in and defend special programs and those who work in the academic mainstream. At *Van*

Tech responding to a changing community has meant the creation of a diversity of schools-within-a-school that creates its own tensions and dilemmas. *Contact* is the school of choice for a particular group of students and as such has more scope to change the curriculum and create an ethos that reflects the priorities of teachers and students.

One of the more problematic aspects of the study was the use of the term *exemplary* in the project name. The term suggests a "truth" about good schools, a position from which to generalize and infer that other schools are or are not up to par. Most of us involved in the project realized that regardless of what was produced, some readers would look to each school for its model qualities. We considered having the name of the project changed to something less exalted. In public discourse we were careful to state that the participating schools were not offered as the finest exemplars in the country. Rather, these schools were defined within their local communities as successful schools and schools that gave careful attention to the needs of at-risk students. For a variety of reasons the name remained.

Seen in a different light, the Exemplary Schools project is about the discourse around everyday life in school organizations and their communities, about the politics of diversity, about the meeting of cultures, about the sociology of isolation, about gender and class and poverty, about teachers and students working together, about problematic concepts such as *excellence* and *student achievement* and *at risk*, about anything that bears on schooling. It is our hope that the case studies and national report, and the articles in this theme issue of *AJER*, will initiate conversations and lead to dialogue concerning the richness and weight of pedagogical action in diverse settings.

The Alberta Journal of Educational Research *Vol. XLII, No. 3, September 1996, 195-207*

Jane Gaskell
University of British Columbia

One Big Study: The Local and the National in the Exemplary Schools Project

The Exemplary Schools Project involved a continual tension between the need to develop a coherent and shared national approach to research and the need to allow for local variation and initiative. This tension reflects the national educational politics in which the study was undertaken. This article explores how the tension was played out in the design of the research and how it was reflected in writing the national report. Despite difficulties, it is argued that the approach taken by the Exemplary Schools Project is based in a democratic and collaborative politics that will produce research that can help to improve education in Canada.

Le projet Exemplary Schools Project engendrait une tension continue entre le besoin de développer une approche cohérente partagée sur le plan national à l'égard de la recherche et le besoin d'y permettre des variations et des initiatives sur le plan local. Cette tension reflète les opinions politiques concernant l'éducation nationale au moment de cette étude. Dans cet article, on explore comment s'est déroulée cette tension dès la conception de la recherche et dans la rédaction du rapport national. Malgré les nombreuses difficultés, on croit que les démarches prises par le projet Exemplary Schools Project sont basées sur une politique démocratique et collaborative qui est en mesure de produire des recherches propices à l'amélioration de l'éducation en générale au Canada.

As feminist theory, among other bodies of literature, has made clear, social values and context influence the ways we know, and any adequate account of research will query the social processes involved in the production of knowledge (Alcoff & Potter, 1993). All knowledge comes from politically and socially located inquirers, and those who fancy themselves free of such influence delude themselves and their audience. They are unlikely as a result to produce the best or most useful knowledge. A reflexive awareness of what those forces are and how they make a difference can be intrinsically interesting, improve our ability to "read" the research, and contribute to our thinking about future studies.

However, inquiring into the social and political bases of knowledge production still has the potential to undermine the credibility of research findings with a larger public that expects "objective" knowledge. Moreover, such inquiry can itself influence the political and social relations of those involved. Any reconstruction of what happened and why will be partial. As one of the principals involved in the production of the Exemplary Schools Project, I had some insider knowledge, but was also outside many of the processes that made a difference to how the research was carried out. My account, then, is situated in my particular vantage point and is an attempt to provide a clearer understanding of the research process to readers of the articles in this journal. It represents an attempt to open a conversation about projects like this, which I argue are extremely valuable in the context of Canadian education. The text has been circulated to

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the Canadian Education Association (CEA), Human Resources Development Canada (HRD), some members of the research committee, and some researchers involved in case studies for comment, following the guidelines we used for the case studies. The writing and the responses make clear that revisiting a research project like this is a tricky, but useful endeavor.

In an article published in *AJER* (Gaskell, 1989) on the politics of educational research, I argued that

> No research can address the entirety of any issue, much less a controversial and complex one, as any interesting policy issue is.... Researchers must simplify, define a frame of reference and a series of questions in order to do their research.... To try to do *value free* or *unbiased* research is simply to conceal, or try to conceal, the implicit point of view in the questions that are asked and the search for evidence.... When a particular study is located in the political debate, it becomes clearer that there is a range of other research studies that might be done on the same topic reflecting different political agendas.... How well the research is carried through is a critical issue and must be subject to public debate and scrutiny. But debate about the adequacy of the data collection must not substitute for debate about the adequacy of the assumptions in which the research is situated. (pp. 407-410)

I concluded:

> Politicization, then, is not a problem. Good policy research should be firmly situated in the literature, in policy discussion, in relation to the researcher's purposes and audience. Rather than claiming neutrality, every project should expose the commonsense underpinnings that situate it in a political discourse. Each part of that discourse has a place for good research. (p. 416)

At the time, I was thinking of small-scale projects where a single agenda could be defined clearly by the researcher, and I urged more political involvement in setting the agenda. The Exemplary Schools Project began differently. It originated with the government's research agenda and was clearly defined by them as "policy-focused, rather than fundamental or academic." In this sense, it was already situated within a political discourse. But this was contract research where a research committee made up overwhelmingly of academics played a key role in deciding what should be done. In this research a broad framework was established, within which different agendas could play themselves out as the research progressed and was interpreted. There were many players with different, and sometimes competing, agendas. I frequently worried that we were trying to do too much, that the focus should be narrower, more clearly defined. But by whom? The research became a process of dialogue among researchers, with the government, and with schools. The structure of the project modeled in many ways the structure that we ended up supporting for Canadian education: local autonomy with complex forms of accountability and continual, intense dialogue to ensure some common understanding and purpose. The challenges we faced in creating a national project that left room for local issues and expression are the same challenges the nation faces with its schools.

The project was always seen as policy-focused, responding to a political environment. Those with a practical and policy interest in Canadian secondary schools (teachers, parents, school boards, principals, provincial governments) were to be considered in the design, research processes, and writing of the study. Representatives of HRD and an advisory committee made up of representatives of provincial and territorial governments made arguments and suggestions about how the research should be carried out. The CEA made the budget and administrative decisions and finally edited the national report. The project was not, however, shaped by dictates from these bodies. Respect for

the research judgments of the researchers on the national coordinating committee was evident from both the federal government department that funded the research and from the CEA, which administered it. As a research committee, we made decisions that shaped the research, and we have to take responsibility for the weaknesses as well as some of the advantages of our method. Moreover, all researchers had the right to publish articles and books based on their research after the national report was released. An archive was created so that others could work with the data and look again at our reasoning and conclusions. The context worked on us all in indirect ways to shape what was produced.

In this article I explore that context and the decisions we made through the lens of tensions between "the local" and "the national." The national coordinating committee developed a research design that allowed 21 research teams in 21 school communities a fair amount of leeway to do the research as they saw fit. At the same time, the national coordinating committee made efforts to stop the project from becoming 21 different studies run as local researchers saw fit. An emphasis on the importance of national coordination sometimes came into direct conflict with the emphasis on different teams and different schools taking different approaches. The project modeled a loose set of relations between the center and the periphery, which it argued for in the research design paper as a way to run research, and implicitly argued for, in its emphasis on local difference and more information, in the national report as a way to run schools. The benefits of a structure that provided considerable autonomy to local groups while using guidelines, meetings, and intensive feedback to keep national coherence was one thing we could agree on. Our agreement about the structure of the project was extended to agreements about schooling. Far from undermining its credibility, this commitment to collaboration with local schools and researchers underpins the credibility of the project.

The research illustrates the dilemmas and possibilities of a national project, where time is short and many players have different agendas, but resources are available and the grasp is large. The problems we faced are those anyone faces in trying to incorporate more than one kind of skill, more than one point of view, into a project—whether it is a research project, the project of running schools in Canada, or the project of being Canada. After living with these tensions for three years, I remain convinced that large-scale, national research like this is indispensable for the health of educational scholarship and discussion in this country. It provides a forum where researchers and educators can discuss the educational meaning of our various cultures and our heritage as Canadians, and it helps clarify the institutional arrangements that will encourage the reflexive understanding that diversity allows, but does not always produce.

Background

The background to the project and its structure are the context in which decisions were made about research design. In the early 1990s education was on the agenda of the federal government. After the Free Trade initiative, much of the debate about successfully becoming part of the global economy was focused on the need to educate Canadians better so that they could compete. Workplaces were demanding more of workers. News media were claiming that 30% of students were not completing high school. The Youth Affairs Branch of Employment and Immigration (now Human Resources Development) was funded for the Stay in School Initiative from 1989-1994 to the tune of almost $300 million. At several of its conferences on dropouts research was recommended. The Innovations branch of Employment and Immigration had a research commitment "to obtain research results about the feasibility, acceptability, effectiveness and efficiency of alternative approaches to significant labour market issues." These two branches worked together to frame national research projects on education and school leaving. Innovations had the research funds and a national research advisory committee. They decided

that survey research on school leavers would be done (Gilbert, 1993). And there would be a study of existing innovations.

Human Resources Development (HRD) commissioned three research papers to explore the parameters of this study of innovations, which eventually became the Exemplary Schools Project (Gaskell, 1993; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1993; Renihan & Renihan, 1993). All of them, not surprisingly given the previous research of their authors, recommended case studies of schools as an approach. The CEA held a seminar to discuss the papers and get reactions from policymakers and CEA executive members in the fall of 1992. The seminar was lively and generated enthusiasm for the project. The participants agreed on the importance of an early start, a case study approach, an attempt to network, and a focus on the quality of education for all young people. At the conclusion of this seminar, one ministry official summed up the discussion by saying the study would be good public relations for the schools and should go ahead. A later meeting with EIC's advisory committee also resulted in advice and general approval.

This research was not contracted directly from the federal government to a university-based researcher as the surveys had been. Because it would involve the cooperation of ministries and schools, an agreement to carry out the research was negotiated between the CEA and HRD some time after the fall seminar. The research would involve studies of secondary schools, attention to successful practice, and the issue of school retention in a global economy, but the details were left open for a research design committee to hammer out. The CEA asked me to chair that committee, which became the national coordinating committee, but none of the papers was designated as the basis of the study, leaving many research questions open.

The CEA is a national body based in Toronto. Twelve of its 35 board of directors' seats are reserved for the provincial and territorial ministries of education, and the rest are elected by its membership of individuals and associations interested in education in Canada. Its constitution states that "there be at least one director from each province and territory. At least eight of the thirty-six directors shall be English speaking and at least eight shall be French speaking." Board members are expected to promote the broader interest of education in Canada rather than the interests of the particular interests groups from which they come. Unlike the Council of Ministers, the CEA board can approve policy with a majority vote. It has experience commissioning research, though nothing on the scale of this project. It brokers and shares information, runs conferences and courses, but has no direct authority over education in the country.

The CEA held the contract for the Exemplary Schools Project. This contract required that CEA keep HRD informed about decisions and provide complete financial reporting. The HRD administrator (Doug Giddings) attended the December and June meetings of researchers and provided feedback throughout the project. The CEA hired an administrator (Pat Fleck) who had worked in a senior position for the Ontario ministry of education, and major decisions involved the CEA's executive director (Bob Blair), an advisory committee that included all provincial and territorial departments of education, and sometimes the CEA executive.

The exigencies of national representation became clear from the start in the way the CEA put together the national coordinating committee. The committee included one bilingual representative of the federal government chosen by HRD (Norm Henchey). Quebec was represented by two researchers, one anglophone from McGill (Mary Maguire) and one francophone from Laval (Claude Deblois). The administrator chosen by the CEA and some members of the coordinating committee did not speak or read French, although the CEA staff was bilingual. All coordinating committee meetings took place in English, and all the minutes were recorded in English. My paper had urged the representation of First Nations as a separate jurisdiction, and this was followed through with the appointment of one researcher from the First Nations House of Learning at

UBC (Jo-ann Archibald) who had good contacts with Aboriginal researchers and school districts. There were also representatives from the Atlantic region (David MacKinnon), Ontario (Dennis Thiessen), Saskatchewan/Manitoba (Pat Renihan), Alberta (Margaret Haughey), and myself from BC.

Committee members were chosen for their geographical base and their experience in qualitative research in the field of education, but we were not chosen because we shared a particular theoretical framework or a particular methodological stance. There were four women and four men among the researchers. All were from faculties of education (though there was initially some interest in having a researcher involved from outside education), and most were from the field of educational administration. We did not all know each other when we started.

We had only a few months to come up with a research design that we could all live with. The first meeting of the national coordinating committee took place on April 21, 1993. Timelines had been negotiated between the CEA and HRD. Although at one point early in the research a discussion took place about slowing down and doing one or two pilot cases in the first year, finances, personal schedules, and the need for timely reporting militated against it. Policy research is time-sensitive, and department budgets cannot be predicted years into the future. It is difficult to commit a group of researchers to a project over the course of four or five years, and we wanted continuity. Schools had to be chosen before the end of June if the researchers were to be in the schools during the next school year. The pressure was on to obtain quick agreement about how to proceed.

The Local: Agreeing to Work With Difference

In this context it was impossible to work through in any detail an agreement on underlying assumptions. No one person had a mandate to impose his or her view, and if anyone had, others would feel less ownership and involvement in the research. We needed everyone's energy and commitment. We wanted to acknowledge differences across the country, especially with respect to Quebec and First Nations schooling. We clearly held different views, and there was no time to work through fundamental epistemological and theoretical questions or to narrow the focus and leave out someone's particular concerns. We had to look for common ground. As a result, the decisions we made about research design emphasized representing and valuing diverse local practices. This emphasis can be seen in the following issues.

Context

The committee agreed quickly on the importance of context. These were researchers interested in qualitative research where context is a key issue. No one on the committee argued for alternative, more tightly structured survey approaches where regional differences would have less opportunity to influence the research. The project would do case studies of whole schools, not particular programs, and it would look at schools in the context of their communities. The local issues that shaped schooling would be important. Although everyone would look at economic, political, social, cultural, and linguistic factors, some would be more important than others in particular studies. We wanted to leave scope for the researchers to explore, for example, what made First Nations schools work and how Catholicism shaped a school in Ontario.

Good Practice

The committee also agreed on the value of emphasizing good practice. This was to be a good-news story, not a condemnation of the school system. "Best practice" research is a popular approach in the 1990s. Many members of the national coordinating committee had been teachers and administrators and all were still working in the preservice and inservice education of teachers and administrators. We identified with the school system, wanted to be helpful, and saw the research as a continuation of our work with

teachers and administrators to improve schooling. We were well aware that condemning practitioners was not the best way to get their cooperation or attention.

The label "exemplary" made it much easier to enlist the help of schools. Although it had been suggested to me by other researchers that we find some successful and some unsuccessful schools to compare, we were not sure how we would get schools to agree to participate in the unsuccessful group. The term *exemplary*, however, had its problems. Notes from the first meeting refer to the "successful secondary school study," and the nomination form asked only for "particularly successful schools." But the term *exemplary* was in the contract somewhere. We were concerned that the term suggested the case studies would hold up the schools in the study as the best in the country, when we did not mean that at all. We did not want all the schools to be portrayed as full of "love, trust, and pixie dust." We had our views about how schools needed to be improved, and we wanted to retain a critical stance in order to draw out policy implications and make suggestions about where schooling should move in the future. The term *exemplary* risked losing a critical edge, when I, at least, wanted the researchers to think analytically about the cases they were documenting, to look at difficulties, to draw lessons about problems as well as successes. Above all, we did not want propaganda; we wanted careful, rich, and complex studies that would tell us a lot about schooling in Canada. All schools change and cope and wrestle with contradictions. The language of *dilemmas*, *tensions*, and *issues* facing all schools became a useful way to keep a positive focus, but to look squarely at the problems facing the schools.

Local Definition of Success

The committee did not predetermine what counted as good practice. Working out an agreement on what counted as exemplary and how we would recognize it would be time-consuming and probably divisive. When pressed, members of the national coordinating committee enunciated different views of what they thought was exemplary, or at least what the balance should be among various factors. Some emphasized a caring or inclusive environment; others emphasized academic achievement; still others emphasized community support. Although the literature had several definitions we could have used, we felt the research begged moral and political questions, as well as questions of how the Canadian context mattered and how a school actually achieved the collegial, supportive, coherent community with instructional effectiveness and high expectations that was described in the literature. Working with statistical measures of achievement was unpopular with many members of the committee, for they held strongly to the view that success was broader than any achievement scores could represent, and that working with the most disadvantaged was the most exemplary form of school practice. It was not feasible in any case, in the time available, unless we studied statistics instead of schools. There are no easily comparable data on achievement available across the country. The first research question, then, would be about what counted as success and good practice in a variety of Canadian school communities.

This was both fundamental to the project and controversial. We were criticized by some researchers involved in the case studies, as well as by outsiders and reviewers, for not having a well-worked-out position on what was exemplary. Throughout the research we were asked variations on the questions of, "How do we know this is exemplary? Will anyone else think it is exemplary? How can we convince a skeptical public that this is exemplary?" However, the research was premised on the notion that exemplary was what we were inquiring about, not something we knew. We wanted to illustrate variations in what might be seen as exemplary and to make the discussion Canadian.

As a consequence, we chose schools by asking others to nominate schools they thought were "particularly successful" and to tell us why they thought so. The nominations were initially sorted and assessed regionally, and this process of selecting brought

into sharp focus our lack of agreement on what a good school might look like. We ended up trying to find different kinds of context and different kinds of success. We made lists on big sheets of paper and discussed what kinds of schools should be included and what the balance was across the country. Before finally deciding on a school, researchers talked with a significant number of people in the province and immediate environs of the school to ensure that the school did have support. We recognized that some would find success where others would not and tried to ensure that as many Canadians as possible would be able to find a school somewhere in the study that resonated with their views of what public schooling should achieve.

Diversity in the Public Sphere

We decided to maximize the Canadian content of the study by looking for schools that illustrated the changes and dilemmas that Canadians were addressing politically: the disappearance of cod stocks in Newfoundland and the impact of a changing economy across the country, the experience of Aboriginal Canadians, the preservation of languages and cultures in schools, the dilemmas of multiethnic, multilingual schools in our big cities, the challenges facing rural schools that are being consolidated, the place of religion in public education, and alternative schools for students who are not successful in the mainstream. Each school would have a different story to tell about Canadian society and the way our heritage is reflected in our schools. The local stories would be given voice through the research; it was felt that the reports should reflect these stories instead of starting with a research literature from elsewhere or an economic discussion of the outcomes of schooling.

Private schools were not included, although the debate on this point went on longer (into the summer) than many other debates. The CEA advisory committee felt strongly that only publicly funded schools should be included. There was also a research argument for studying only the public fiscal framework, even while understanding that independent and religious schools were treated differently across the country and that different provinces had different definitions of which schools received how much public money. Private schools might offer some interesting models of practice, but some wondered how applicable the lessons would be to the public school context.

Ethics and School Responsiveness

The code of ethics we adopted left much unsaid, but tried to balance the needs of the school community with the needs of the researchers. Schools would be encouraged to use their real names, although they could adopt a pseudonym (only one did). The necessity of reassuring and gaining the cooperation of schools, as well as our own beliefs about the respect due to participants in our research, meant leaving room for the schools to respond to the reports. The ethics guidelines specified that

> Copies of each school's report will be shown to the school before reports are released. Participants will be encouraged to comment on the report and will have the right to suggest modifications and withdraw any comments attributed to them if on reflection they feel the comments are damaging or inaccurate. If they wish to provide an alternative interpretation of the findings, this will be published along with the research team's report.

Data collection was to be based on mutual respect, feedback, and the protection of individuals in the schools involved. The researcher was there to record and to be a critical friend, not the expert on what schools should be doing. As the HRD emphasized quite correctly, educators have higher degrees and are often knowledgeable about educational research. We hoped that school-based research would lead to a useful dialogue where people in schools discussed with researchers how to improve the case study, and researchers provided insights and documentation that schools would find

useful to reflect on and improve their practice. In the first heady days, plans were made to have conferences that involved practitioners as well as researchers and to publish each case study in both languages so that multiple copies were available for discussion across the country. No longer would Quebec schools be a mystery in BC. No longer would the issues on the prairies fail to be relevant to the Atlantic provinces.

For all these reasons, the design report that we finally put together and that was agreed to by the HRD and the CEA, calls for 21 studies by 21 research teams, all taking place in the same school year (1993-1994). It called for studies that

> will take into account the dynamic relationships between and among people, the evolving culture of the school, the structures, practices and strategies that exist in the school. A rich description of a single school will explore participants' ways of thinking, perceiving, valuing and judging, as well as ways of acting, and it will document the differences among people, as well as the commonalities that emerge in a single institution.

In about half the cases a member of the national coordinating committee would be the principal investigator, or a co-investigator. In the other half the principal investigator was selected and supervised by a member of the national coordinating committee. In all cases there were groups of researchers involved in a single school study. Sometimes local members of the school communities were also researchers. Of the final school reports, two have a single author, eight have two authors, one has three authors, four have four authors, four have five authors, and two have six authors.

This was a complex and highly decentralized study. We tried to build in local differences as a positive benefit: several audiences could surely be served in one project of this size; different approaches could achieve our goal.

The National: Keeping a Single Framework

But this was a national design. As we reiterated many times, this was one big study, not 21 small ones. A coherent, quality project must result. The design report says, "This study is conceived as a single national inquiry into secondary schooling, asking the same general questions of 21 school communities across Canada." Five such questions were agreed on, starting with "How do members of the school community describe, recognize and respond to school success?" Other questions dealt with context, with organization of the school, with students, and with at-risk students.

Some of the first feedback from HRD (then EIC) emphasized their concern about the project flying apart into 21 different studies. "EIC reaction to Draft #3 of the design report was positive. Final design report should be more specific about national coordination, process and criteria of selection, justification of the number of cases" (notes of June 30, 1993 meeting).

The development of national protocols was one response to the call for greater coherence. The protocols became a touchstone for the debate about how much uniformity the case studies should have, how much should be structured from the center, and how much should be left to the local teams to negotiate with their schools. Draft protocols were developed and circulated with this introductory note:

> The protocols are developed 1) in order to ensure that each research team will orient itself to some of the same questions in each school so that a single national report can be written covering the questions outlined in the research design report and 2) in order to help the research teams get started without having to reinvent the wheel. This is a lengthy and in some ways intimidating set of questions. It is assumed that each regional research team will take these questions, meet with the schools and researchers involved, and adapt them and develop their own approach more fully.

Through the protocols we would ensure, for example, that every research team explored the issue of gender equity, even if it did not arise of its own accord in discussions with teachers and students (as it tended not to). Protocols would also ensure that every one of the 21 teams asked employers some questions about what they expected in hiring young people, looked at school budgets, asked about teacher collegiality, and contacted parents to ask about their views of success in school. The protocols elaborated, in considerable detail, themes that were mentioned in the five research questions.

There was resistance to this move. One comment on a draft of the protocols noted, "I am left wondering where my 15 years of research and teaching experience working in the area of school improvement come into play ... given the breadth of pre-ordained data gathering requirements and questions laid out in the suggested protocols." Another commented, "It compromises the kind of research we are trying to do by placing the need for consistency across sites above all other considerations." Another said, "Checklists leave me shivering (shuddering, shaking, vibrating, and most other forms of involuntary body movement)." Other, more gentle reminders of the importance of diversity of approach were, "I hope we can come to an agreement on a common database across sites which does not divert us from exploring the unique features and strengths in each school" and "We want to keep our preconceived foci as open to challenge as possible. At the same time, the work you have done is very useful." National protocols were worked on, discussed, and eventually approved by the design committee. The process presumably made the assumptions of the research clearer, and some researchers have told me they were helpful. I referred to them when I was trying to clarify expectations and hold researchers accountable, but protocols were barely referred to again on the coordinating committee.

Another response by HRD was to work with Statistics Canada to obtain demographic data on all 21 schools. This allowed some comparison of the socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural bases of the schools. But the statistics were not available in all cases and were not meaningful if a school did not draw equally from all families in a geographic area. The significance of many of our numbers was not clear; they came after drafts of the school reports had been written, and these statistics were not used as much as they might have been.

National coordination relied to some extent on documents and contracts that held people accountable and specified directions, but the coordination relied largely on meetings and discussion. Regional coordinators were responsible for meeting with, supervising, and producing common agreements among the teams in their area. This was easier in some locations than in others. In BC all the researchers were faculty members and graduate students at UBC, and the schools were within driving distance. We met every other Friday to discuss relevant readings, go over transcripts and coding, critique drafts, and update each other on progress. The reports we wrote were similar in approach. On the other side of the country in the Atlantic region, the schools and researchers were widely dispersed, less well known to each other, and meetings were much more difficult to arrange. Moreover, the group had to operate in two languages when not everyone read, much less spoke, both languages. The resulting reports from that region had much less similarity.

National meetings brought all 21 research team leaders together with the coordinating committee twice. The design report (draft 5) emphasizes the importance of these meetings:

> Commonalities across sites will be developed through national meetings throughout the year of fieldwork. In early October, as the field work begins, a meeting of the research coordinating team will share and develop protocols for interviews, document analysis and observation. Half way through the data

> gathering, in December 1993, the principal researchers at each school will be gathered together for an extended (5 day) discussion of their studies. At this meeting the developing analysis of each school will be presented, so that observations can be shared, developing analyses can be discussed, policy implications can be considered and the inferences being drawn from one site can inform the analysis at other sites. This meeting will be critical in the process of developing a single national study from diverse local studies. A second meeting of the same people will be held when the field work is completed in July, in order to inform the development of the final reports for each site.

These meetings were a success, although negotiating two languages was a problem, and some of the francophone researchers risked being marginalized. Debate certainly took place, assumptions were clarified, and a sense of camaraderie developed. Practical suggestions for the research were shared (ride the school bus, find out if there *is* a school budget that is public), and we all gained a sense of the other schools in the study.

It was also agreed that three of us (the HRD coordinator, the CEA administrator, and I) would visit all sites and talk with all research teams and people in all schools. This emphasized the national dimension of the study and again led to active, engaged discussion among those of us who traveled together, and with the researchers and schools on site. In one instance, the visit led to concern on the part of the school about an imposed national agenda, deduced from the questions asked. The exchange of letters after these visits put comments, questions, and reflections on the record. In my letters I comment, "Like you, I really liked the school ... At the same time, we have to recognize this as a particular culture, and not one everyone would love"; I offer observations, "Moving across so many schools probably makes me especially aware of some differences among them, and I offer what stands out at Etchemins in this context"; and I ask questions, "What school records are kept? Do you have statistics on First Nations students? Can you use some classroom interaction data to show how it works?" Intensive formative feedback improved the research and helped us to begin to develop some of the themes that would form the national report.

Accomplishing this research depended on collaboration among researchers, the CEA, HRD, and school communities. It relied on sharing power even when power was unequally held, on compromise and maintaining mutual respect through trying moments. This in many instances improved the quality of research in terms of usefulness and impact. It provided much information about successful local practice, which became the basis of a national report. It also sometimes took off the critical and conceptual edge, blurred accountability, and made the focus of the research unclear. Although local practice was described, often in glowing terms, it was less easy to discover systematically what was happening to school retention rates, which schools had more money to spend than others, how disadvantaged students described their teachers (though we had plenty on how teachers described their students), and how unequal rates of school achievement were among identifiable groups. There was no detailed consensus in the research committee to impose on all the case studies. Neither the CEA nor HRD imposed research decisions on the committee or the local research teams, much as they may have been tempted to, much as I sometimes wished they would impose my views.

Writing the National Report: Local Leadership and Central Direction

National debates about education in Canada have often become debates about jurisdiction as much as about the substance of issues, from the introduction of the technical and vocational training act of 1914 to setting up task forces on educational indicators and testing in 1994 (Manzer, 1994). The provinces have jealously guarded their independence and avoided national educational institutions. This project often had some of the same feeling: respect local jurisdiction (the decisions of those doing the case studies)

and be careful about insisting on a national agenda (a common framework decided centrally).

The argument for local jurisdiction reflects the view that education is not tied to a national economic system, but to local community values, languages, religions, and cultures. As Whyte (1994), on behalf of the Council of Ministers, pointed out, education is a social and political activity and Canadian society is increasingly pluralistic. "Education is an integral part of the social fabric of a nation. It is not a production system" (p. 11). Good schooling, he argues, requires a large degree of consensus on values, and this consensus cannot be found at the national level. "Tidy minds" may find it frustrating, but diversity and local control must remain the name of the game. After all, he concludes, increasing decentralization is the direction of the future, and a decentralized model has served Canadians well thus far.

But there is pressure for more national coherence, much of it focused on the failures of the system to respond to new economic conditions and the need for more efficiency and effectiveness (Lazar & Greenwood, 1994). This was the context for our study. The Prosperity Initiative, the Economic Council of Canada report, the Conference Board of Canada initiatives, and the Corporate Higher Education Forum have all argued that standards of schooling must be raised and that a national effort to increase standards, improve accountability, and develop pathways into work is vital. Canadian education has "no central policy, limited and unfocused research and development, an impoverished statistical base and a negligible leadership capacity" unique among OECD countries (Robertson, 1994, p. 30). We are all affected by how young people are educated. This is not a question that has importance only for the local community.

The question of a coherent national vision arose as we confronted the task of writing one national report, which was to summarize important findings and inform policymakers about their meaning. Twenty-one draft school reports had been written and discussed in June 1994 when some themes for a national report emerged. Final versions of the school reports were submitted, reviewed, and modified throughout the next year as the national report was being written. The school reports were reviewed several times by external reviewers, suggestions for changes were received, and more revisions were made. But at the final press conference in August 1995, the CEA released a national video and a national report in French and English. The status of the school reports remained uncertain for several months. The cost of translating all the reports was more than the budget could bear, CEA publications had to be bilingual, and publishing only a few was unacceptable, partly because of the politics of who would be represented. Toward the end of 1995 all the reports were made available through the CEA in the language in which they were written. The CEA's emphasis on the national report as opposed to the school reports was a sore point with researchers, who had worked hard to make their reports publishable, and with schools who anticipated having copies of the reports for their own purposes.

The national report was to make recommendations for policy. I wrote drafts (some very rough) that were circulated, criticized, and discussed, then revised. The CEA did the final editing, this time without giving researchers the final say. Again, we were always pressed for time and for a shared framework. As one committee member pointed out in relation to an early outline I circulated:

> There is a dilemma here. On the one hand we have argued from the beginning that we are not approaching the schools with an a priori position on what constitutes an exemplary school; we are allowing the definition and criteria to emerge from the nominations and the data. We have been trying to judge the schools, not in terms of some universalistic criteria, but on the degree to which they are meeting the norms and expectations they have selected.... On the other

> hand, we're now talking about taking a position ... whose position? (religious, conservative? classical? liberal? Marxist? positivist?).

The answer was to revert to the values that underlay the research in the first place: respect for local difference, understanding diversity in context, placing the local in a larger context, and trying to get some critical distance through this approach. The themes that emerged in the national report were those we had discussed in relation to definitions of success and the selection of schools: diversity and equity, the social and the academic, autonomy and accountability. By taking vignettes from the various school reports, the report showed the difference that context made to how these tensions were defined and acted on. The balance of critique and celebration, of common judgment and respect for difference was always at issue. The result was a report illustrating the advantages of, and asking respect for, local variation, while trying to point out dilemmas and recognize legitimate demands for accountability.

This national study ends up arguing to protect and enhance local jurisdiction of schools, rather than arguing for national curriculum or national goals. It recognizes the common economic, social and political pressures that push schools toward hierarchy and sameness, and is critical of the uniform emphasis on a few academic subjects at the senior secondary level. It supports devolved leadership, community involvement, and more diversity of approach. In order to achieve all this, it emphasizes the value of information, of research, and of a wider range of indicators of performance. To quote the last line of the national report,

> What make these schools and educators successful at present are ultimately their sense of being special, their alertness and discernment in reading the landscape, their imagination and energy in responding to pressure points, and their competence and dedication in engaging their students in the pursuit of important ideas, valuable skills, and humane values. (Gaskell, 1995, p. 281)

We had collected data on local initiatives, and the national report affirmed the value of those initiatives.

Arguing for a clearer federal government role in educational policy, Robertson (1994) says, "National has come to mean action only when consensus has been reached, and I fear this is a recipe for Spiceresque debate and an endless quest for partnerships" (p. 28). She wants a more decisive national intervention that emphasizes the things we share as Canadians, that puts concern for social justice above jurisdictional disputes. She speaks to my own wish that everyone could agree (with me) on what exemplary is and how we can recognize and build it. But that is unlikely, and in the political sphere we work with the consensus we can find and perhaps build a little. Exemplary Schools found a consensus around respect for the local, whether it be teacher leadership in schools or strong principals, the infusion of religious commitment into a school's ethos or the expression of diversity, strong community councils or teacher autonomy. Exemplary practice is found in the energetic and thoughtful responses some communities have made to their own context. Such a view allows action without consensus, while encouraging shared knowledge and debate across constituencies that usually do not talk to one another and that may be acting in quite different ways.

Debates about schools can be seen as debates about the interaction between the local and the national, indeed the global, just as this project can be seen in that light. But the local is infused with the national, and the national is the sum of many local contexts. By working between the two, we aim to improve schools and research. Pragmatic, postmodern, democratic, piecemeal, collaborative: The approach of the report can be described in a variety of fairly vague terms, but it reflects the politics of education in Canada in which we were situated. The federal government had an uneasy presence in educational research, the CEA had to keep myriad educational groups happy, and the

national coordinating committee had to work together through their differences. What we agreed on was to struggle toward respect for our differences. This stance marks a shift from cultural dominance to what Taylor (1994) calls the politics of recognition, the claims to equal worth that one group may make on another.

The result of a good research project may also be that we know more about how to do it better next time. The question of when it is appropriate for funding agencies to intervene in research in order to ensure their questions are answered and how research and policy communities can productively work together is not easily answered. More case studies of how it has worked and what the successes and frustrations were would be a sign that Canadian educational scholarship has come of age. Now that Exemplary Schools has sketched in some major themes that arise in secondary schools across the country, another study could take one of them to explore in more depth: the education of deaf children; site-based management; systems of accountability. What kinds of exemplary practice exist across the country, and how can we learn from them? Through the Exemplary Schools Project we developed knowledge and relationships that, if combined with a critical awareness of what we did this time, should facilitate national studies of issues like these in the future.

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Method, Methodology, and Dangling Conversations

The Exemplary Schools Project is one of the largest educational research projects ever undertaken in Canada. A committee of 10 individuals designed and coordinated the study, and a total of 51 researchers from across the country prepared the 21 case studies. In this article I recount a number of the decisions we made concerning design and method and draw on some of our work as a Design and Coordinating Committee to highlight differences between method and methodology, as well as variations in the conceptualization of qualitative research.

Le projet Exemplary Schools Project est une des plus vastes recherches éducatives jamais entreprise au Canada. Un comité de 10 personnes a préparé la méthodologie d'enquête et a coordonné le projet. Un total de 51 chercheurs et chercheuses ont préparé 21 études de cas de partout au pays. Dans cet article, je rapporte un nombre de décisions que nous avons prises concernant le modèle et la méthode choisis et je m'inspire de notre travail en tant que Design and Coordinating Committee pour signaler les différences importantes entre méthode et méthodologie, ainsi que pour souligner quelques variations dans la conceptualisation de la recherche qualitative.

Remembering

Someone mentioned the word *culture*. I do not recall whether it was during our first or second meeting as a Design Committee, and I cannot put a name to the person who said it. But its impact on me was significant. It took me back to doctoral studies in educational administration at the University of Alberta and a graduate course in ethnography that I had taken in the Department of Anthropology. I remember my professor, who was also a member of my dissertation committee, telling us, in effect, that the study of culture involved a significant time commitment and that some of what she read that claimed to be ethnography was not of the sort that any self-respecting anthropologist would recognize. I had also just completed a co-authored article on school culture for an edited book with a colleague from the University of Victoria, and in it had argued that some of what passed for organizational culture studies in educational administration was more akin to Rist's (1980) conception of "blitzkrieg ethnography." Yet here we were at this early stage talking about describing the cultures of different schools in the span of a few short weeks of fieldwork. I interjected that our brief time in the schools, although lengthy by some standards, would not be sufficient to allow us to talk intelligently about school culture. There were nods around the table, but I was unsure whether everyone agreed.

I remember wondering at that moment whether our differing conceptions of qualitative research would cause problems as the project progressed. In retrospect, my worries were ill-founded. Our group worked well together and managed to see a large and difficult project through to completion in a cooperative and collaborative manner. Yet, from my perspective, there were differences in the ways we conceptualized qualitative work, and I use these differences to frame the story of method and methodology that follows.

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Beginnings

In total 51 researchers were involved in the Canadian Education Association's Exemplary Schools Project. That is, 51 names are listed on the 21 case studies that were produced and are currently available from the CEA. However, the story of this national research study begins well before most of these researchers became involved, indeed before many of them knew there was an Exemplary Schools Project.

One beginning is assembling eight educational researchers from across the country along with one researcher who served as liaison with Human Resources Development Canada (the funding agency) and another from the Canadian Education Association who acted as the project administrator. We were four women and six men, and we were nine Caucasians and one Aboriginal, and we were five bilingual and five unilingual speakers. Our work involved the design and coordination of a massive study. Jane Gaskell chaired the committee, and each of us assumed responsibility for coordination in a region of the country. The idea was that we would work cooperatively to carry out an educational research project the scale of which had never before been undertaken in Canada.

In the text that follows I recount the decisions we made around design and method and intersperse this factual story with my perspectives on methodological tensions and contradictions. However, there are many texts to the Exemplary Schools Project, so I feel obligated to stipulate that this is my story of method and methodology, and that others involved with the project might, and probably would, render a different account. Stories of the past (or the present, for that matter) are necessarily fragmented. Hindsight is both privileged and distorted.

Sensing Method and Methodology

The Design Committee met for the first time in Toronto in April 1993. I recall experiencing both excitement and trepidation on the flight from Nova Scotia. The excitement came from the opportunity to be involved in a project of this magnitude and to work with colleagues from across the country. The trepidation had its origins in my own sense of insecurity around the worthiness of my contribution to the project. After all, many of the team members were more senior than me in terms of their experience in the academy and their involvement in research projects. I had just completed my doctorate five years earlier, and although I had been actively involved in research in the interim, my vitae was shorter than those of most of the others.

Beginnings are important. One example is meeting a class for the first time: that first meeting sets the stage and gives a teacher an initial sense of how things will go. This meeting was no different. Once the introductions were completed, we sat around a large table and began discussing the project. Our dialogue was animated and productive. Yet it was during this first meeting that voices in the back of my mind began demanding attention, saying things I did not want to hear. Like any good junior member of a committee (I did feel that way initially) I tried to suppress them and convince myself that my emerging disquiet was unfounded. My concerns did not lie with the individuals assembled around the table. My initial impression, and one that held true throughout, was that this would be an excellent group with which to work. Rather, my concerns rested with the mixed signals I was receiving about qualitative research. Everyone seemed to buy into the language: we would undertake a series of *qualitative* case studies of secondary schools across the country. Yet, as I listened, it became apparent that although everyone seemed to be on side regarding *method*, there was variation in the way that *methodology* was being conceptualized.

The difference is important. Method refers to the techniques and procedures used to gather and analyze data. Methodology, on the other hand, speaks to the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie the choice of particular methods (Guba, 1990). Smith and Heshusius (1986, p. 8) use the phrase "logic of justification" to describe

the ontological and epistemological assumptions that influence how a particular researcher sees the world and constructs intentional research action (chooses methods). If we accept that research is influenced by assumptions of this type, researchers have an obligation to render them visible in the construction of social inquiry. To do otherwise is to privilege method and ignore methodology.

In this regard the term *qualitative* research has traversed a somewhat troubled course. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) see qualitative inquiry as an umbrella concept that involves multiple research strategies, but offer five defining characteristics: (a) data derives from natural settings with the researcher as the key instrument; (b) data are descriptive; (c) data are concerned with process rather than just outcomes; (d) data are analyzed inductively; and (e) "meaning" is of central concern. Yet the spirit of this orientation is not always what comes through in practice. In much of what I read and hear about qualitative research, I am taken aback by the frequent debates about method and the silence around methodology. This imposes positivistic overtones on qualitative research. That is, it fundamentally equates method and validity, placing an overreliance on method in the determination of "valid" research findings. This has lead to a contemporary "qualitative" research that frequently moves away from the spirit of the qualitative paradigm and the underlying ontological and epistemological premises. Although method is not unimportant in qualitative research, it assumes a lesser position in the assessment of "validity" when compared with the relationship between researcher's text and the stories told by participants.

My position on the criteria spelled out by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) (and by others in the area of qualitative research) has evolved over time. As a doctoral student I bought into these positions and those like them, that *these* were the ways that could lead us to a richer understanding of social phenomena. I debated vehemently with those who adopted alternative positions and drank beer only with those who shared my views. I now think I was naive. It seems to me that hidden within these criteria is an argument for an alternative way for arriving at the "truth." That is, if we could just do away with the "superficiality" of survey research, pretests and posttests, tests of significance, and the like, and replace them with healthy doses of face-to-face interaction between real people in everyday settings, we could explicate the core features of everyday life. I no longer believe core features are there.

My argument now is that the strength of qualitative methodology lies in its license to tell stories. Every social site has at least as many stories as there are people, and the stories they tell are influenced by who they are and who they have been. The stories that are set down by researchers are the researchers' stories, regardless of how frequently they quote their participants. Researchers still need to look carefully, to listen attentively, to write lucidly. If quoting verbatim they still need to ensure they have the words and the spirit of text correct. They still need to create pictures that bring situations to life for those who were not there. But the arguments for "rigorous" methods (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1994), although well intended, ultimately come across as attempting to capture a truth that is not there. The attempt to create "valid" stories is an argument for telling "truthful" stories, even if we use the language of multiple realities. As Wolcott (1994) notes in a reflective essay on an earlier work:

> I can state unequivocally that I find no counsel or direction in questions prompted by a concern for validity. There is no exact set of circumstances here, no single or "correct" interpretation, nothing scientific to measure that tells us anything important. For every actor in these events there are multiple meanings. (p. 365)

I am still open to alternative interpretations and I find debates on these issues lively, or, in the language of my children, awesome. But I pause when others argue for accurate stories.

These debates were lived out in the Exemplary Schools Project, sometimes silently and other times in open discussion. The dialogue across the many tables we shared clearly revealed to me that there were those for whom methodology was of primary concern and others for whom method was the main consideration. Yet these differences were never explored in any depth, partly as a result of the need to keep the project moving along and partly to maintain political support. Open dialogue can be as dangerous as it is illuminating.

How Do We Deal With "Exemplary"?

Shortly after we first met as a Coordinating Committee we learned that ours was to be a study of "exemplary" practices in secondary schools, especially as they relate to the circumstances of at-risk students. That is, we were to focus on practices that encourage and support students who might otherwise be unsuccessful. However, the umbrella of the study was broader than at-risk students, which permitted us to look generally at "exemplary" schools and the sociocultural environments in which they operate.

One of the most troubling aspects of the study, and one that would plague us throughout, was the use of the term *exemplary* in the project name. One dictionary defines the concept as "fit for imitation; model." The term suggests a "truth" about good schools; a position from which to generalize and to tell others they are or are not up to par. Most of us immediately realized that regardless of what we actually produced, the reading audience would look to each participating school for its model qualities. Indeed, in our negotiation with school personnel it became apparent that some individuals were excited about having their school associated with a project that had this title, even though the dangers of putting selected schools on a pedestal were apparent to most. Although there was some discussion of our "exemplary" name, the decision was made to remain with the title under which the project was funded. However, in an attempt to reveal our concern and temper the impact of the title, we were careful to state in public discourse that the participating schools were not offered as the finest exemplars in the country; rather, that they were defined in their local communities as successful schools and as those that apparently gave careful attention to the needs of at-risk students. Nonetheless, in the first public presentation of the study at CSSE in Montreal in 1995, one member of the audience asked, "What is exemplary about these schools?" Despite the challenge to recognize and legitimize different stories, we still occasionally find ourselves looking for truthlike statements, for essences, for prescriptions.

Selecting the Schools

One problematic yet rewarding aspect of the design was the process by which participating schools were selected. We were working with a short timeline: our meetings began in April 1993 and the process for selecting schools had to be in place before schools closed in June. Our decision was to construct a nomination form that would be mailed to identified stakeholders across the country, thereby allowing local constituents to define successful schools rather than negotiating and imposing our own definition, a process that I am convinced would have taken months. Turning the task of definition and identification over to others was our tacit recognition of the absence of a national consensus on successful school practice and access to the multiple definitions that exist across the country. However, in an attempt to secure a basis for comparison, we suggested in the nomination form that individuals might consider such factors as the school's reputation, student achievement, dropout rate, and the general satisfaction of students with their school. In order to be nominated a school had to include the final

year of secondary education for that province or territory (normally grade 12; grade 11 in Quebec).

Over 2,000 nomination forms were mailed to stakeholder groups and individuals. The list included every ministry of education, every school district, all university faculties of education, media representatives who cover educational issues, arts councils, chambers of commerce, labor organizations, First Nations communities, and school trustees. Over 250 schools were nominated with approximately two thirds of all nominations coming from school districts.

The next stage of the process involved selecting 21 schools from those nominated. We made the decision that diversity would serve as a guiding concept in the selection process. The members of the Committee examined the nomination forms carefully, with regional coordinators concentrating particularly on nominated schools in their areas. This process enabled us to narrow the list to approximately 40 schools. The schools that appeared most promising were then investigated in greater depth. This included examining available information on school retention, gender differences in program participation, provincial and local achievement patterns, scholarships, public recognition and awards, demographics of the student population, and securing opinions in addition to those of the nominators. In some cases preliminary visits were made to nominated schools. On this basis 21 schools of varying sizes and cultural circumstances were selected. This was not a random sample. These schools were intentionally selected to represent the cultural and demographic diversity of the country.

Yet even here we found ourselves in the thick of multiple conceptions of "good" schools. For example, I had selected a school in one of the Atlantic provinces that looked particularly promising. I visited the site in the summer of 1993 to talk with central office and school administrators. The visit was fruitful, and I left with a good feeling about the school. Granted it was summer and I could not observe classes in action. Yet intuitively I sensed that this school would make an interesting and worthy case study. However, a few days later our project administrator called to say that provincially maintained school measures, including student achievement data, were not strong for this particular school, especially when compared with those of one other school that interested us in the same province. His comment, as I recall, was that if the media ever found out that we had selected a school with weak student achievement results compared with one with strong results we could be in trouble. I backed down and have regretted it ever since.

This example speaks to the power of achievement measures and the difficulty of making a case for "successful" schools if these measures are weak. We talk about developing the whole child, about creating an environment where children can grow intellectually, emotionally, socially, and even spiritually, about enhancing self concept, about critical thinking skills, about good citizenship, and so on. Yet all this is seemingly lost when school statistics are published at the end of the academic year. In many ways this mirrors the quantitative-qualitative debates by comparing "hard" data with "soft" data, with "hard" winning most of the time, at least in policy circles.

Guiding the Research Process

It was often stated in our meetings that this was to be one study in 21 schools. Although this irritated every qualitative bone in my body, the intent was to ensure a level of sameness in research approach across studies. That this disavowed the nature of context on researchers' actions by suggesting that like actions are appropriate in different contexts was not seen as problematic by everyone around the table. Nonetheless, we tried to ensure that everyone addressed a core set of questions above and beyond anything else they might pursue.

The Committee constructed five questions that were to be used by each research team to guide their study. The first was: How do members of the school community describe, recognize, and respond to school success? The intent of this question was to

explore with members of the school community, including administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community groups, their articulation and understanding of their own goals and aspirations and how these were manifest in school action.

The second question asked: How does the school interact with its administrative, political, and socioeconomic-cultural context? This question focused on issues of governance, relations with the board or band, and the ways in which the social, economic, and cultural context of the community made a difference in school operation. Particular attention was to be given to the relations between parents and schools.

In the third question we asked: How do the organization and the social processes of the school, as well as the beliefs of members of the school community foster an environment supportive of success? Researchers were to focus on leadership in the school and the nature of relations between school personnel, the curricular and extracurricular programs, the organization of teachers' work, professional development, and the ways the school dealt with change and difference.

The fourth question was: What characteristics of student life in the school encourage success? This was to include an examination of student involvement in school activities, the ways they were treated by teachers and others, differences in cultural backgrounds, academic ability, language, gender, and economic status. It was our intention that classroom experiences would be central to the study, but this proved rather disappointing in terms of the amount of researcher time actually spent observing in classrooms.

The last question queried: How does the school respond to students perceived to be at risk of dropping out before completing their secondary education? This was intended to incorporate themes from the previous questions in order to identify the central issue of student engagement and the treatment of difference.

Hidden in the language of these questions is another challenge to the spirit of the qualitative paradigm. To ask "how does the school interact?" is to reify the school organization and suggest singular action. Greenfield (1993) reminded us that organizations are the consequences of human action. They do not exist as a singular entity, and to talk of an organization as if it were one voice or had one philosophy is to deny the plurality of human intention and action that is the organization. We might better have worded the question: How do members of the school interact? The point may seem picky, and at one level it is. But it reminds us of the underlying paradigmatic assumptions that seem to get closeted or not internalized in the first place.

Team Action

During the summer of 1993, members of the coordinating committee were assigned two tasks: to investigate promising schools as case study sites and assemble research teams to conduct the studies. Each site required two to four researchers depending on the size of the school. Researchers were selected based on their experience in qualitative case study research and their availability. Other factors played a role as well. For example, in the Atlantic region it was clear that researchers involved in a francophone school in New Brunswick should be Acadian and those involved in a study of a school in outport Newfoundland should be Newfoundlanders. Researcher acceptance in a school and broader community was a critical issue in these instances; to assign individuals "from away" to these schools would have compromised the study.

This process resulted in the selection of researchers from a number of universities across Canada: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Acadia University, Mount Saint Vincent University, Université de Moncton, Université Laval, McGill University, University of Toronto, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Saskatchewan, University of Alberta, Simon Fraser University, and the University of British Columbia. Contracts were negotiated with each university, a process that in some instances proved difficult because each institution had its own set of research rules and these did not always dovetail with the requirements of the study.

Fieldwork for each team began in the fall of 1993 and was completed by the spring of 1994. During this time two national meetings were held with all principal investigators and members of the National Coordinating Committee. In December 1993 we met in Toronto to explore the status of each study, examine preliminary reports, identify emerging themes, and discuss work that needed to be done during the second phase of fieldwork. A second meeting was held in Montreal in June 1994 to examine first drafts of each study and to identify modifications that were needed before final reports were submitted to the Canadian Education Association at the end of August.

Although these meetings were intended as a time for sharing and looking ahead, they were also troubling in terms of mixed messages. It became obvious as first drafts were completed and forwarded to the CEA that not everyone interpreted the intent of the study in the same way. Our "exemplary" title and focus on successful school practices occasionally resulted in reports that focused only on the good, with little attention to the problematic aspects of some schools. In some cases the tone of a report revealed not only a school-positive focus, but advocacy for the school on behalf of the researchers. I believe that this did not derive solely from misinterpretation by the principal investigators, but also reflected misinterpretation and miscommunication by some of us on the Coordinating Committee.

Yet even here the very nature of research action can be called into question. Advocacy is not necessarily problematic if one comes from a critical or participatory action frame of reference as did some of the researchers. However, for those concerned with researcher effect and "twisted" stories, advocacy was a concern. Telling *the* story is not the same as telling *a* story. To pretend that a researcher has gazed on a sight and seen it in its entirety is decidedly silly, approaching an assumption of omniscience. Nonetheless, even though we might recognize this at an intellectual level, accepting multiple stories and interpretations of the same site is difficult for many to juxtapose with deeply ingrained notions of truth and objectivity. The power of these latter concepts reveals itself in our everyday language. We talk about the reality or the truth of the matter. So it was with our Coordinating Committee. No one ever talked about true stories or being objective. But it was there in the matrix of many conversations.

The Fieldwork

Access was negotiated with each school community in different ways. In most cases this involved meetings between school and district personnel and the researchers. During these meetings the nature of the project was carefully explored, as well as the ways data would be collected, analyzed, and validated. These meetings also provided an opportunity for school personnel to assess the researchers themselves to determine whether these were individuals they wanted in their schools for prolonged periods of time. This face-to-face aspect of qualitative case studies is crucial, for the strength of the research is determined in large part by the presence, or absence, of trusting relationships between researchers and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 256).

The amount of time spent on site varied. We suggested that each team prepare for four weeks of fieldwork spread over two on-site visits. Typically this translated into a two-week visit in the fall of 1993 and a visit of the same duration in the spring of 1994. In the cases where participating schools were located close to a team's university, access was flexible. In other circumstances teams faced either a flight or long drive to a school, and research activities had to be carefully planned to ensure efficient and effective use of on-site time. Ideally, moving toward an understanding of a school and its context requires time to learn the cultural rules and patterns of interaction. Yet, as Stake (1995, p. 51) reminds us, "there is always too little time." Many of us involved in the Exemplary Schools Project found this maxim to be all too true.

Theoretically, method should flow from methodology. That is, if the methodological orientation is to study a phenomenon holistically—to the extent that this is possible—the

methods and actions of the researchers need to allow for this to happen. Research teams used a variety of methods, with individual and focus group interviews and document analysis being the most common. Interviews were held with central office personnel, school administrators, teachers, staff, students at all levels of the school, parents, community and business representatives, and others as appropriate at a given site. In addition, relevant documents were collected and examined, including student and teacher handbooks, class assignment sheets, course selection information, minutes of staff meetings, statistical data on student achievement and enrollment patterns, mission statements, school and district budget data, and information on professional development, to name a few.

Beyond this some teams developed brief questionnaires to collect data not easily accessed by other means. Others used videotape to capture selected events and shadowed school personnel to gain a sense of day-to-day routine. Still others assumed participant observer roles to document events in schools and the larger community.

Although on the surface this may look like something approaching comprehensive coverage, anyone who has undertaken qualitative research knows that the best methods are no guarantee of telling an *accurate* story, in the modern sense of that term. My assertion is premised on the above-mentioned general principle of qualitative research, that method and validity are not as closely linked as in quantitative inquiry (MacKinnon, Young, & Hansen, 1990). Wolcott (1988) reinforces this position in stating that the use of all available ethnographic techniques is no guarantee of creating an ethnography. Instead, in the mainstream qualitative literature, validity is tied to the relationship between the story told and the experiences of the participants. Researchers need to demonstrate that their account of the site is recognizable to those who took part in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In the Exemplary Schools Project, researchers returned drafts of the final reports to the members of the school community, asking them to check for the veracity of quotations and the integrity of the overall story. Meetings were then held with participants to discuss the report and correct inaccuracies.

Accurate?

But what does it mean to be accurate? Does it mean we have told the truth? Does the fact of the matter exist, and we might simply have missed it? These questions take us back to where we began, to the heart of methodology. There are at least three lenses through which this question of accuracy may be viewed.

The first is the common way in which accuracy is postulated in qualitative research: as a correspondence between the story told *by* the researcher and the story told *to* the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 296) see this as a twofold task: carrying out the inquiry in such a way that the findings will be found to be credible (method), and having findings approved by the "constructors of the multiple realities" (member checks). Although it is hard to argue that method is unimportant, or that checking with participants is unnecessary, it is quite a different thing to do this and then claim accuracy in some immaculate sense of the term.

The second lens through which to view accuracy is that of voice. Although much has been written in the qualitative literature on the importance of voice and rendering voice audible in text, Hargreaves (1996) reminds us that a teacher's voice, for example, is sometimes taken as *the* teacher's voice. The danger lies in decontextualizing some teachers' voices from other, dissimilar teachers' voices and the contexts of teaching, as well as from other voices that have worthy things to say about teaching and learning (p. 13). Hargreaves urges us to "hear and study voices across a range of teaching contexts," and to "hear and study the voices of marginalized and disaffected teachers whose perspectives may threaten or challenge your own" (pp. 13-14).

This position reminds us that there are as many stories to tell about a site as there are people, and that stories change with time. In the Exemplary Schools Project the researchers tried to hear as many voices as possible at a given site. It was our intention that researchers would speak with all members of a school's community, including students, parents, board members, and community representatives. Yet a reading of the case studies indicates that teachers' and administrators' voices frequently outnumber, and occasionally dominate, other voices. They are more accessible to researchers, more talkative.

A third lens queries whether it is even possible for one person (a researcher) to represent the voices of others (participants) in text. As a researcher, I can construct a text that draws heavily on direct quotations from participants. I can then return to the participants and ask if I have quoted them accurately, and whether I have used the quotes in a way that maintains the integrity or the spirit of what they were trying to say. I can even provide the best of "thick description" (Geertz, 1973; Ryle, 1971) that probes the thoughts of participants and that brings life to the stories in a way that readers can "see" them multidimensionally. But the "fact" of the matter is that I have used *their* words in *my* text. What I have done is tell *my* story, nothing more. Morgan (1983) tells us that in research, as in conversation, we meet ourselves. Perhaps this is the only person we meet, and then only to the extent that we have revealed ourselves. One of my graduate students told me recently that the only way others can be represented in text is to write their own (J.R. Bowers, personal communication, January 8, 1996).

Perhaps in telling the stories of a social site, accuracy is a superficial concept. It seduces us into thinking that there is *the* story with a number of chapters. It satisfies the canons of particular traditions and probably wins us accolades from colleagues. It probably gets us published and adds to the thickness of our curriculum vitae. Perhaps the most important thing it does, if we are lucky, is contribute to the discourse on social life. I no longer read published works for their accuracy, unless I am deeply suspicious of what the author is saying. I see them simply as stories worthy of dialogue, and never as truths.

As I see it now, the reports in the Exemplary Schools Project represent at best freeze-frames of, or one take on, people who in one way or another deal with teaching and learning. They tell us what the researchers have seen and heard in a particular time and space. Each report is highly interesting and worthy of animated dialogue. And through such dialogue we may discover interesting and alternative educational futures.

From a Distance

The Exemplary Schools Project officially ended in August 1995 with the release of the National Report (Gaskell, 1995) and the closing of all research accounts. In many ways it was a most satisfying experience. We were able to see a mammoth project through to the publication of 21 case studies and a national report. I feel privileged to have been so closely involved with the study.

The disquiet I felt at times is not surprising in a project of this size and scope. Each of us brought our own unique perspective on qualitative inquiry to the table. Yet the timelines were so short and the obligation to do the *right* things with such a large amount of money was so onerous that discourse on methodology was silenced compared with the demands of method and design and expediency. I suspect the funders and project administrators assumed that because we were all known as qualitative researchers we would be talking the same language, and that philosophical exploration was unnecessary. In some ways they were right, for the wrong reasons. Philosophical discourse would probably have meant that every deadline facing us would have fallen by the wayside.

The legacy of the Exemplary Schools Project is 21 case studies and the National Report and, for those of us involved, a chestful of memories. I have been told that the

reports are selling well. In one sense this pleases me immensely. Yet that same voice in the back of my mind is whispering once again. It is trying to persuade me that some people are reading these reports and making lists of the identifiable features of exemplary schools, and that others are reading and asking, "What's so *exemplary* about these schools?," and still others are hiding a statement within a question: "They spent *how* much money on this?" In my opinion this is not about lists, or whether a school meets one's personal conception of excellence, and certainly not about cost-benefit analyses. For me it is about discourse around everyday life in school organizations and their communities, around the politics of diversity, around the meeting of cultures, around the sociology of isolation, around gender and class and poverty, around teachers (adults) and students (children) working together, around problematic concepts such as *excellence* and *student achievement* and *at risk*, around anything that bears on schooling. If it starts some conversations, opens some doors and minds, gets people talking about the richness and weight of pedagogical action, it will have done what I hoped it would do.

There is yet another legacy of the Exemplary Schools Project. All of us involved with the study, from the members of the Design and Coordinating Committee to the individual researchers who worked on each case study, now know each other. In a country as large as this, and one that has historically lacked a national educational research community, the possibilities of increased dialogue and collaboration are encouraging. It makes projects of this scope well worthwhile.

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Attautsikut/Together: Understanding Cultural Frames of Reference

The Northwest Territories is committed to a concept and vision of culture-based and inclusive schooling as articulated in many public policy documents. Awareness is increasing among many residents of northern villages of the value and potential of education to strengthen Aboriginal communities. This article focuses on Qitiqliq Secondary School and the hamlet of Arviat in the Keewatin region. We examine the methodological challenges and issues we experienced in understanding culture, change, and success in Qitiqliq Secondary. We focus on the complexity of understanding and representing cultural differences and appreciation of teaching and learning as sociocultural activities. Emphasis is on the shifting social, cultural, linguistic, economic, and political boundaries that intersect, overlap, and collide with one another and how they impinge on the cultural frames of reference of Inuit and Qallunaat members of the hamlet.

Tel que présenté dans les nombreux documents publics énonçant différents aspects de la politique à l'égard de l'éducation, les Térritoires du Nord-Ouest sont dédiés à un concept et à une vision d'une scolarisation basés sur la culture prédominante et l'inclusivité. Les nombreux résident(e)s des villages nordiques semblent devenir de plus en plus sensibles aux bénéfices et aux valeurs qu'apporterait une formation et une bonne éducation à leurs communautés aborigènes. Cet article vise en particulier l'école Qitiqliq Secondary et le hameau d'Arviat dans la région du Kéewatin. Nous examinons les défis méthodologiques qui ont influencé notre perception et notre vision de la culture, des changements sociaux, et du succès à l'école Qitiqliq Secondary. Plus particulièrement, nous visons sur le degré de complexité à comprendre et à représenter avec justesse les différences culturelles ainsi que l'appréciation de la pédagogie et de l'apprentissage comme activités socioculturelles. On met en évidence les limites sociales, culturelles, linguistiques, économiques, et politiques qui s'entrecroissent, qui s'entrelacent, qui se chevauchent ou bien qui s'affrontent les unes avec les autres et comment celles-ci-là empiètent sur les ententes culturelles de jadis des Inuit(e)s et des Qallunaats du hameau.

Inniaqtuq: Inuuqatagiit/Learning: People With People

A Sense of Place: Locating and Situating Community and School Contexts

We begin with an open invitation to an education event that took place on March 17, 1994 in the hamlet of Arviat in the Northwest Territories (NWT).[1] This notice of a meeting (Figure 1) was posted in the two languages used in this community, Inuktitut and English, in the Northern Store which functions as a supplies store and the local

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WHAT WAS, IS AND WILL BE EDUCATION?

Are you concerned about the education for your children? What ideas, experiences do you have in bettering our education system? Do you wish to have your say?

Then come...

...to a public meeting at the Mark Kalluak Hall on March 17, 1994 at 7:00 p.m. to give us your past, present and future views on education.
David Webster will be facilitating this meeting. This is being supported by David Webster and members of the community who commit themselves to education.

Figure 1. Invitation to the Education Event.

bank. We initiated this event with the help of hamlet members, the Principal and Vice-Principal of Qitiqliq Secondary, a school where one Inuk and 14 Qallunaat (southern) teachers provide learning opportunities for 210 students in grades 7-12. As the notice in the Northern Store indicates, education can be viewed here from the past, the present, and the future.

Understanding the patterns of living, teaching, and learning in this community[2] and how all these affect the lives, dreams, and hopes of Qitiqliq students is to appreciate the shifting social, cultural, linguistic, and political boundaries that shape the vision and the reality of teaching and learning here. To the outsider these boundaries can sometimes be as firm or as permeable as the shifting patterns of the snow and the voices as strong or as soft as the shifting wind patterns. The more inroads we made gaining access to the varied perspectives of hamlet members, the more we—as white, mainstream researchers—understood the complexity of the problem of interpreting and representing cultural frames of reference. Whether mainstream researchers should be involved in researching issues that pertain to Aboriginals is open to debate.[3] However, our task as researchers in the Exemplary Schools Project was to describe the meaning of success in Qitiqliq Secondary and in Arviat.

Setting is a starting point in any inquiry. That is, it is in a particular place at a particular time that cultural encounters, dialogues, and negotiations of meanings occur, and shared understandings are constructed. The emerging and changing realities of the larger contexts are significant in considering an obviously political, socioeconomic, and value-laden concept like success in any community. It is especially complex in an Aboriginal community that is evolving from a traditional lifestyle and land-based

society to a wage economy in a settlement with a rapidly developing and relatively young population. Members of this hamlet are moving back and forth between Inuit and Qallunaat traditions at a time when movement toward self-affirmation, defining and preserving an Inuit identity, and educating children for the 21st century are fundamental concerns in the NWT.

In 1999 this area and the Keewatin region, in which 90% of the children speak Inuktitut as their first language, will constitute a new political unit, Nunavut (Our Land), a home for Inuit people in northern Canada. The NWT is committed to a concept and vision of culture-based and inclusive schooling—a vision that is articulated in many Ministry of Culture, Employment and Education public documents such as *Our Students, Our Future: An Educational Framework*.[4] Many of the policy documents and the public rhetoric in the NWT articulate a commitment to education as a shared responsibility. There is increasing awareness among many residents of northern villages of the value and potential of education to strengthen Aboriginal communities. What might this mean at the local level when many members of such communities have had few formal experiences of schooling or blame schooling for stripping them of their language and culture?

Little public evidence documents the realities of school and its implications for Inuit adolescents from the perspectives of local communities like Arviat. This hamlet of 1,325 has 80% unemployment and a community population of which 50% are under 16 years of age (compare Statistics Canada, 1994). Adolescents here are both present students and potential parents of future students. In some cases they are parents themselves, as grade 12 student Mary Ann explains: "I have two babies and two grade 12 courses to finish. I'll talk to Shirley (Vice-Principal) about how I can finish my two courses."

Explanation of school success and/or failure is complex. The pressure to prepare students for the global economy, postsecondary education, and the local Arviat market presents a creative learning challenge for parents, teachers, and students. The question arises, What are the most relevant learning experiences and knowledge that Arviat students like Mary Ann need to enter the local market or move beyond it? This question is especially complex for researchers who are examining the phenomenon when they do not speak the local indigenous language and their cultural frames of reference are different. This article examines the methodological challenges and issues we experienced in understanding culture, change, and success in Qitiqliq Secondary and the hamlet of Arviat.

In our role as mainstream researchers and outsiders, we focus on the complexity of understanding and representing cultural differences and of appreciating teaching and learning as sociocultural activities. Emphasis is on the nested contexts: shifting social, cultural, linguistic, economic, and political boundaries that intersect, overlap, and collide with each other in complex ways (Maguire, 1994, 1995). The recognition of multiple interconnecting contexts helped situate and locate Arviat's and Qitiqliq's shared and negotiated understandings of teaching and learning. The education event was a useful strategy to help us illuminate the tensions between competing visions of education and appreciate the complex, delicate networks of social relationships in Arviat and Qitiqliq that are attempting to meet the learning challenge (Government of Canada, 1992, p. v). Both the hamlet and the school are in transition, with one guaranteed constant: *change*. Many tensions and contradictions emerged in our cultural dialogues with students, parents, teachers, and members of the community. They point to the complexity of understanding education as a process of cultural negotiation and of problematizing mainstream researchers' actions and their textual representations of cultural differences when they are from outside (Maguire, 1995; Moll, 1990).

Newly renovated Qitiqliq Secondary is the only Inuit school in the Exemplary Schools Project. It has a visible presence as one of the largest structures in this Aboriginal community. To understand the different cultural frames of reference surrounding the concept of school success in an Aboriginal community like Arviat and a school like Qitiqliq is to appreciate the multiple nested layers of contexts (Maguire, 1994) that shape teaching and learning. This includes the social and academic structures of the school and classrooms; the history and norms of teaching and learning; the attitudes, values, beliefs, and language uses of the school and community; and the intricate web of historical, political, and social relationships between community and school. The first difficulties we experienced in adopting a situated methodology were both theoretical and practical. How do we describe and define a concept like community and Arviat in particular? From whose perspectives could it be best understood and represented? These questions relate to an intertwined problem in conducting inquiries in cultural contexts, that of interpreting voice and negotiating research and communicative space for the expression of multiple voices and perspectives.

Situating this northern community in its geographic context was simple enough, but not methodologically unproblematic. Located north of the 60th parallel and tree line on the west coast of Hudson's Bay, Arviat appears on some maps as Eskimo Point. Community maps indicate clear boundaries of the hamlet laid out on an east-west axis. At the community event, elders recall that community schooling did not get under way until the mid-1960s. They remember decades of government- and/or church-dominated education geared to assimilation and the silencing of voices in Inuktitut.

Negotiating Cultural Landscapes, Traditions and Change

No roads lead to this cold, windy place, a settlement accessible by air year round—barring fog, ice, snow, or mechanical airline failure—on a gravel strip next to the bay area. That supplies for living and teaching are flown in is a subtle reminder of the practices and values of formal schooling that have been, and continue to be, imposed on indigenous cultures and communities. The severity of the climate and the distance between Arviat and Montreal where we live proved to be two practical challenges that we faced as we tried to understand the negotiated, shared, and shifting cultural frames of reference here.

The first challenges were of access, establishing and negotiating lines of communication. We were cognizant of the limited number of site visits we could make and wanted to maximize our time on site. Traveling and accommodation in the north are costly. Return economy air fare from Montreal to Arviat is $2,418.13; accommodation at the only local hotel is $150.00 per day; the cost of food is high (e.g., four liters of milk can be as high as $13.00). In addition, communication between Montreal and Arviat was difficult between site visits (e.g., unreliable or delayed mail delivery can take up to two weeks, static interference or problems in telecommunications that make communication halting and artificial, and most of all the lack of opportunities to engage in face-to-face communication before beginning data collection). The intensive periods of data collection during our three visits meant that we had no personal time or space to remove ourselves from the site and reflect on the research process. This raises an interesting methodological question in addition to the issue of researchers' physical stamina: How does one come to understand the cultural frames of reference of a community like Arviat and a school like Qitiqliq? The short and most obvious answer is that is takes time and multiple ways of looking. May our desire to listen and understand be greater than our desire to judge and prescribe.

In addition to the complexities of geography and expense, another methodological dilemma we faced early on was: Where do we begin our evidentiary trail in locating and representing their histories? To situate Arviat in the past, we relied on collected docu-

ments and contact with the elders of the hamlet. For example, brochures prepared for the Eskimo Point (Arviat) Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Committee of the Inuit Cultural Institute, describe this area as a traditional, summer camping area of Pallirmiut Inuit, one of several groups that lived on the mainland tundra and coast areas of western Hudson Bay. Arviat became a permanent settlement with the establishment of the Hudson's Bay post in 1921. Since then various agencies and associations such as the RCMP, Hunters and Trappers Association, Housing Association, Inuit Cultural Institute, and the Tungavik Nunavut Federation have contributed to the historical development of this settlement. These associations are listed in Table 1. Although this historical and evidentiary trail was easily accessible and we scanned material before our arrival, it remained transparent, lifeless, and a textual representation of a community historically situated in time and place by others—some Inuit and some Qallunaat—each leaving its own cultural traces and imprints.

Uncovering the intricate formal and informal relationships that exist between school and community required gaining access to the social networks and key individuals who could engage us in sociocultural dialogues about education (Milroy, 1981). We started with the administration of the school and then worked outward to the local community. In addition to the national protocols, we relied on different types of evidence: the individual and collective memories embedded in members' conversations, oral stories, and students' symbolic representations. Many locals at the community event recalled the 1960s when their Inuit elders abandoned their nomadic lifestyle in igloos and tents and moved to small matchbox houses in settlement sites, a move some believe was initiated by government pressures on parents to have their children attend school. A Qitiqliq student describes the changes and the establishment of a white cultural and economic power base:

> In our community there are lots of different families. In earlier days there were many groups of people. I think there were four groups near Arviat. When the government came to Arviat, this became a larger community. Some white people moved in here for jobs. In the late 1970s. Arviat became a dry community. There are a variety of businesses and jobs in here but mostly the whites work because they got the jobs first. Our community is controlled by local government and the municipal of Arviat which we call the hamlet.

In retrospect we now better appreciate why Luke Suluk, chairman and founder of the Arviat Historical Society, sees the importance of collecting oral histories about Inuit moves from nomadic life styles to settlements sites, going south to residential schools, and various memories of childhood. He sees this as a way to get people interested in Inuit history, to trace their cultural roots and help keep the culture and traditions alive.

Secondary teacher Elisapie Karetak, an Inuk and key informant, provided us with many examples of these stories such as the following excerpt from *Remembered Childhood* by Martina Pihujui Anoee, an elder of Arviat:

> One of the things I really enjoyed as a young girl was to carry a baby on my back in a beautiful amauti (carrying parka). At that time Amautis had beautiful trimmings. Anyone's parka would do as long as it had beautiful trimmings ... It is now my realization what when we were children we had a real appreciation of family. We had a great time being at home.... It seems that they are scattered all over the place. We love them very much. Why don't they stay at home now? (Maguire & McAlpine, 1994, p. 19)

These excerpts contrast with a more recent experience told by Albert, a student who went out of the community and returned. He writes about going south and being uprooted from his family:

Table 1
Historical Development of the Community by Various Agencies Year of Establishment in Eskimo Point

Hudson's Bay Company	1921	Hunters & Trappers Assoc.	1966
R.C. Mission	1924	Housing Assoc.	1967
Anglican Mission	1926	Education Committee	1969
RCMP	1936	Glad Tidings Church	1969
Alliance Mission	1946	Padlei Co-op	1971
Federal Day School	1960	Inuit Cultural Institute	1974
DIAND	1961	Local Radio Show	1974
Nursing Station	1961	Hamlet Council	1977
Community Council	1961	Tungavik Federation of Nunavut	1982
Arts & Crafts Shop	1965		

(Inuit Cultural Institute, n.d., p. 3.).

> In the year of 1985, I was sent out of town to be under the care of the Department of Social Services. I don't remember the month or the day. The event took place during the spring session. My parents were notified that the Social Services were making arrangements for me to be sent out without my knowledge.... Managing my education and living independently aren't easy. I am sort of happy about being at home. I am just hanging in there until I graduate from High School. Hopefully, I'll manage with the help of teachers and the community. I'm very happy to be at home with a very bright future. Ever since I was sent home, I have kept my culture. I always have and always will. The community has grown a lot since I was sent out. But it hasn't changed a whole lot. (Maguire & McAlpine, 1994, pp. 20-21)

Although his story may not be typical of most Arviat students, it signals an important tension that many of them feel: the choice between staying in the community with the experience of belonging, or moving out of the community for education or employment and experiencing the excitement of new places, but also isolation and longing for family.

On April 1, 1999, the day that the government of Nunavut comes into being, the population of Qitiqliq students with whom we talked will range from 19-25 years of age. In 10 years the present kindergartners will be leaving secondary school, and some will no doubt be parents of children themselves. The time, place, and particular interplay of people we interviewed including this young population made us reexamine our mainstream notions such as adolescence. For example, in Inuit culture some eastern Arctic elders speak of *ISUMA* which loosely means thought or wisdom, believed to be usually acquired at age 12 or 13, after which children are expected to behave responsibly. At the same time, adolescents at Qitiqliq school reflect on the possibilities and confront the realities of their future prospects in Arviat and the larger community of the NWT as illustrated in Figure 2, which includes a map and the poignant comment by a senior secondary student: "Hopefully I will have a job in the North at home in 20 years."

What will the future bring? The answers are sometimes obvious and sometimes uncertain, and certainly as complex and varied as the multiple contexts in which teaching, learning, and living are embedded. It is now well over 10 years since the NWT published its report *Learning, Tradition, and Change*, which presents a vision of schooling and education for Inuit children and the argument that "learning is the key to our future" (Government of the NWT, 1982, p. 11). The 1983 resolution of the Inuit Circumpolar conference general assembly affirms that the goals of Inuit educational systems are to prepare the children for life based on values and skills from Inuit culture and

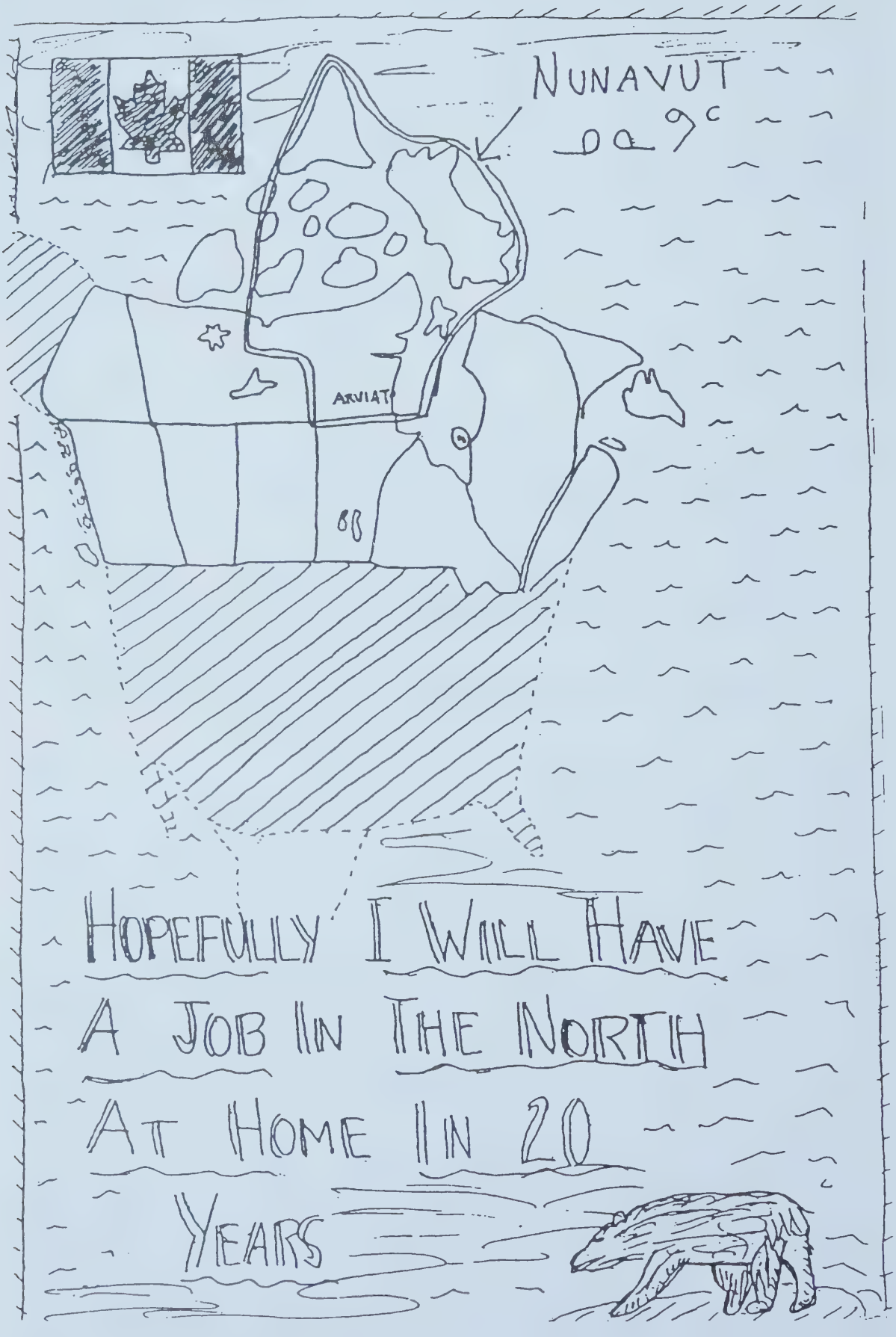

Figure 2. Map of Nunavut.

western culture. Traditional activities still form some part of daily life for many individuals in the hamlet. It is not unusual to see a hunter heading out on the land to get caribou, people outside their house preparing to stretch a skin, or hides hanging to dry on a line. Women prepare skins, sew kamiks and make amautiqs, and prepare food in the traditional way.

The rhythms of traditional lifestyle are quite different from the southern business-oriented cycles that students are encouraged to appropriate in school and work study situations. Fixed schedules are unnecessary and nonproductive. Discipline is expected to grow internally. Casmir, an Arviat elder explains: "Children who are loved are brought up well. If disciplined they grow up bad. Children need not be scolded. Just loved. If they are scolded, they will be harder to discipline." Arviat parents rarely intrude on a child's activities unless the child is in extreme danger. At the same time, children are expected not to interfere in adult activities, to listen, not to speak. As the cultural inclusion teacher explains: "Children learn by listening, watching, and doing." Language is rarely addressed directly to children unless to direct their actions. Teasing and humor are frequently used as a means of social control. School counselor, Peter Alareak describes some of the cultural differences this way: "When white men talk about rules, some of the students, the younger Inuit students, do not understand the rules. We don't exercise rules in our culture."

Students are expected to move back and forth between northern and southern traditions and ways of communicating. Particularly striking is the sense of urgency, uncertainty, and youth. As one students writes, "I'm in the considering age." Another student in junior secondary wrote the following in response to a teacher's question about his future dreams and hopes: "While I'm in high school I think about being a carpenter. There are many things I want to be but it is a world of tough questions and decisions." A student in the Career Orientation Program (work/study) commented about his future during a visit to his worksite: "I could be a janitor or an office worker. There must be other things but I don't know what they are." Our challenge was how to tap students' perceptions of schooling and life experiences, especially when we did not speak Inuktitut.

Speaking of and Negotiating Languages

Over 90% of the Inuit in the Keewatin speak Inuktitut as their first language. Language is the principal marker of their distinctiveness. Inuktitut means "like an Inuk" and is intimately linked to Inuit cultural identity. Another obvious methodological challenge we faced relates to the problem of giving voice and authority to participants in research accounts, for example, in different languages such as Inuktitut and English. In the context of nurturing the past in their children while preparing them for the future, language becomes central in any discussion about education and success. The ongoing dilemma is, Which language policy will best prepare children for the future? The past and current language situation and language of instruction in school varies from one circumpolar region to another. In Arviat, as in most Northern communities, we found direct and indirect evidence to support the fact that language is a major political, sociolinguistic, and cultural force and tension.

Although individuals rarely initiate talk about this tension, nuances of it surround all individuals in the school and community. Because we do not speak Inuktitut, such nuances eluded us although some emerged more explicitly in our discussions about educational policy, the role of language in school programs, and meeting the needs of Inuit children. We relied on two Inuit informants, Peter Alareak and Billy Ukutut, who frequently played the role of cultural and linguistic brokers and helped us make connections. This made the research process a continuous backward-and-forward process of translation and interpretation and double voicing (Bakhtin, 1988). In addition, some

research protocols were translated into and conducted in Inuktitut and retranslated into English. In coding the transcriptions for emerging patterns, we sensed that certain subtleties were probably lost in the translation process. This was especially true with respect to understanding the nuances surrounding students' cultural positioning between the languages and accessing students' accounts of the world and their perceptions of success.

Although Inuktitut is the first language of all the students, it is not for the mainstream teachers who teach in Qitiqliq secondary. With the exception of one Inuk teacher who speaks Inuktitut and English, all speak only English. Most documents that students see in their community and school are written in English (e.g., signs, notices in the Northern Store). Students can access through satellite dishes much of the English mainstream media such as the latest fashion, music, or violence in North American cities. Some programming on radio and TV makes it evident that Inuktitut has the power to be a vehicle for conducting all aspects of their lives. Nevertheless, and not surprisingly, the power of English is seductive, pervasive, and frequently associated with social and economic success.

Many Inuit at the education event recalled the late 1960s and early 1970s when English was often the only language used for instruction in schools and their Aboriginal language was suppressed. In 1977 the government of the NWT enacted educational legislation that established local education authorities, which in 1983 became community education councils. This legislation gave them the authority to determine what language or languages would be useful for instruction in their community schools. In 1990 members of the Arviat Community Education Council "expressed unequivocal support for an Inuktitut-English bilingual program" that was already in existence (Keewatin Divisional Board of Education, 1990, p. 9). At that time the review team for Qitiqliq school drew a number of inferences from information gathered in interviews, meetings, and classroom visits:

1. The majority of parents of school-aged children in Arviat want both Inuktitut and English used as languages of instruction in Qitiqliq school.
2. There is a strong desire in the community to maintain the Inuit language and culture. The school is seen as having an important role in the community's efforts to this end. Recently there has been some opposition to this bilingual maintenance model of language of instruction from some parents who favor English-only instruction.

The language issue presented us with a number of additional methodological dilemmas. For example, the two informants Alareak and Ukutut pointed to less obvious, but nonetheless important, issues surrounding the use of Inuktitut in Arviat. These related to attitudes about the quality of the language and dialect differences in the region and the NWT. For example, choosing an appropriate dialect for Inuktitut words used throughout the research account was problematic. This was a necessary but not sufficient condition for ensuring that multiple voices are heard. For example, in the community, language is a way of differentiating families from traditional groups. Individual members of the community also talked about the differences among the four dialects of Inuktitut (Pallirmiut, Baker Lake, Ahamuut-Ennadai, Rankin Inlet) used in Arviat as well as the standard and nonstandard uses of English and Inuktitut at home and school. Some also differentiate between high and low Inuktitut, with a resulting perceived high or low social status. Others differentiate between "baby" and "adult" Inuktitut. Using and talking about language was filled with subtleties and tensions that we were told about but could not fully appreciate. Nor could we fully represent how in this community language identifies different traditional families and how this affects students' social interactions in classes taught by mainstream teachers. In our conversations people raised the intertwined issues of language and culture in relation to providing the best

opportunity for their children. As in many Aboriginal communities, we have we learned that there is no consensus on solutions or their significance from participants' perspectives.

Negotiating and Interpreting the Webs of Significance

The webs of significance that Geertz (1973) calls culture "thicken in complexity the further one goes in exploring them" (p. 5). The further we explored, the more we became aware of how our own analytical representations were necessarily distinct from participants' own practical and symbolic representations of them. These were not items that could be ticked off by using mainstream observational schemes, nor classified in neat, linear boxes. They certainly resisted essentialist, single-cause explanations (Dillabough, 1996).

All individuals we talked to are concerned about the future of the students at Qitiqliq Secondary. However, there is difficulty envisaging what that future may be. Patsy Owlijoot (Community Education Committee) explained, "When students who are in school, they start thinking about ... what am I going to do when I finish school? There are no jobs." However, the belief shared by many is that completion of secondary school will be an important requirement. Recognition of the limited possibilities exists side by side with a strong desire among many that students will stay in, not leave, the community. Given the demand for more scholarity in order to obtain the few jobs available, students will increasingly need to go away for postsecondary education if they are to have access to these jobs. Thus some community members believe that creative ways need to be found to develop local job opportunities. Others believe today's children may never have jobs and need to learn other ways of feeling successful and contributing to the community.

Both Inuit and Qallunaat agree about the urgency of the need for Inuit with secondary education. How best to meet the need and reconcile the tensions between Aboriginal learning traditions and Westernized institutions of schooling is unresolved. In interpreting these tensions we were faced with a pivotal question, What is meant by culturally appropriate and responsive education? In positioning ourselves within these tensions, we risked making what Geertz (1973) calls two types of errors in dealing with the problem of representation: overinterpretation and underinterpretation of members' viewpoints, and not appreciating the varied perspectives of community and school in the various textured accounts of school and success offered.

The historical documents showed us that the transfer of responsibility for education to the territorial government was the catalyst that led to a 10-year plan to change and improve schooling in the north and to build a foundation for a northern school system and curriculum that emphasizes the languages and cultures of the north. To this end, we were able to discern a number of organizational changes that have occurred, such as the move from centralized to increasingly decentralized local control of education and curriculum. For example, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (1993) provides a framework for accountability that includes a mission statement, guiding principles, and goals of the NWT—a Westernized textual representation of what schools should be about. It is important to note that "these directions establish the base for all educational activities in the NWT school system and form the criteria from which its success is measured." Yet "within that educational framework, school jurisdictions establish their own goals and priorities, which are in turn used to measure their own success" (p. 11).

Herein lies the real rub in understanding the varied textures and collisions between different cultural frames of reference, especially as they relate to differences between Inuit ways of learning and Qallunaat institutionalized ways of teaching. Formal, centralized, established institutions like the Ministry of Education, Culture and Employ-

ment and the Keewatin Divisional Board of Education both articulate the importance of local control. However, they have an explicit need to evaluate and monitor it by external, westernized standards of schooling and success as represented in the normative language of benchmarks, indicators, outcomes, and institutionalized symbolic forms such as tests and report cards.

Understanding success can be understood at a macro level in the larger contexts of the changes that those in the hamlet, region and territory are experiencing and perceiving. This is a settlement and school in transition, having only begun in the last three decades to experience formal Qallunaat schooling. They are also in transition from a traditional subsistence-based living style to a more market-driven economy. Locating the source of the tensions and shared understandings presented another set of methodological challenges in our attempt to understand, *from students' accounts*, how the negotiation of conflicting values is lived out in this community in a continuous fashion. The staff and community members struggle to maintain a linguistic and cultural Inuit identity and traditions while still meeting the challenges of mainstream Qallunaat notions of school achievement and normative standards. Two ways in which we gained access to students' perceptions of success were through engaging in cultural dialogues *with them* and through our analysis of their textual representations as culturally expressive works (Maguire, 1995).

Engaging in Cultural Dialogues: Conversation as Research Strategy

Engaging in dialogue is one way that members of schools and communities share a vision and create resources for participating in the development of an evolving culture-based schooling. As educator Bruner (1986) argues, culture is constantly in the process of being recreated and is

> as much a forum for negotiating and renegotiating meaning and for explicating actions as it is a set of rules for specifications for action ... It is the forum aspect of culture that gives its participants a role in constantly making and remaking the culture—in active roles as participants rather than as performing spectators who play out their canonical roles according to rule when the appropriate cues occurs. (p. 123)

In our attempt to understand the transitional state of the school and the hamlet in their process of self-definition, we frequently found ourselves entering into people's lives, their conversations, their meetings, their classrooms, and their thoughts. For example, on our second visit, we arrived in mid-March, to find the teachers and staff engaged in a midterm review of student progress, as well as a review of the school by the Keewatin Divisional Board of Education (KDBE). Teachers, staff, and the review officials agreed on the explicit ways that Qitiqliq creates educational and employment opportunities for students through fundraising, flexible timetables, sharing resources, and improving links between the community, labor market, and the school. The implicit links and nuances were not always easily discernible and challenged our alertness to seeing more than the obvious. Understanding the implicit dimensions required listening to and asking what individuals were doing and why they were doing it. Thus conversation and dialogue served as strategies for understanding the diverse cultural forms in both the school and the larger Arviat community. These conversations were wide ranging—from inadvertently finding out how they derived the school's name, Qitiqliq, to understanding the day-to-day cultural encounters and overlapping forms of dialogue and cultural collisions that seek solutions in day-to-day lived social forums.

That the name of the school Qitiqliq means "Middle Finger" and that it is named after an elder in the community emerged from a formal interview with the administrators of the school. Principal Jean Williamson explains, "It is not in the Inuit tradition

to name buildings after people, but they had to call the school something. So they decided to name it after one of the eldest members of the community who told stories about the old lifestyle." Vice-Principal Shirley Tagalik elaborates:

> I knew her when she was a very old lady who could not leave her match box house. She was always willing to talk. When we sent little groups to visit her, she would sit them down and they were there for the day ... The school was already named after I arrived. Those were some of the kids from grade 2 class and those kids are 25 and 26 ... She always had an opinion on everything. She was very self-assured and outspoken ... and wanted things to be remembered.

Tagalik pointed to the Igloo project built by elders as part of the Cultural Inclusion Program as another reminder of the challenging rigor of the old lifestyle on the land in this northern community.

The following narrative abstracted from our field notes signals our growing awareness of the nested contexts that impinge on day-to-day cultural encounters—in this case communication between teachers and students. It signals as well our appreciation of the varied textures of the sociocultural landscapes against which daily classroom activities and student learning take place and how cultural frames of reference are negotiated and constructed.

Understanding Cultural Encounters and Forms of Dialogue

> The usual early arrivals are already there sipping coffee as other teachers arrive and take off their various layers of clothing, scarves, mukluks and windpants. Several plates of muffins and cookies from the Saturday evening social are on the counter next to the coffee machine and microwave. Most of the talk in this relatively large staff room focuses on a comparison count of how many report cards have to be delivered today. (Teachers deliver report cards directly to their students' homes when their parents have not come to parent teacher interviews) There is a general consensus and reasoning about the low parent turnout yesterday: " A lot was going on in the community last night (e.g., voting for Nunavut and a Church event, a parent teacher night for the elementary school on a different evening) and besides the parents all know the staff." One of the teachers new to the school this year remarks; "It could be a better day for delivery of report cards especially near the windy bay area where most of the parents I need to see live." Several teachers arrange for an interpreter to accompany them on their home visits. Two other teachers negotiate the loan of a skidoo for the morning to deliver their report cards. Another two discuss, interpret and exchange opinions on yesterday's staff and the review meetings with the representatives from the Keewatin Divisional Board of Education (KDBE) on the weekend. Three teachers sit on the couch near the teachers' mail boxes and talk about the integration of curriculum and the idea of Family Groupings used in another Northern community school. A student support teacher queries the Vice-Principal about funding and allocation of teaching assistants in the Keewatin Divisional Board of Education.

Academic achievement is a concern among the teachers and a hope for many members of the community who have children attending the secondary or the elementary school; so report cards are a key link between home and school. Both members of the community (parents) and school are attempting to change the stereotyped image of northern Aboriginal schools and communities that are equated with low attendance, high dropout rates, and lack of parent involvement.

Conversations in venues such as the above explicated for us some of the difficulties that mainstream teachers have in communicating with children and members of non-

mainstream communities. This issue has been well documented in cultural discontinuity theory (Moll, 1990) and studies of minority language (Maguire, 1994) and Aboriginal groups (Crago, 1992; McAlpine & Crago, 1995; Philips, 1983). A number of these authors have argued that problems of communication between Aboriginal and mainstream English-speakers stem from basic differences in the social organization of discourse and communication patterns between the two groups, as well as from different expectations of teaching and learning. These differences led to miscommunication and misunderstanding and frustrate the efforts of teachers and students to work effectively. Through the organization of home visits, and despite the difficulties, members of the Inuit and Qallunaat cultures in Arviat and this community school are attempting to transform the negative images that are frequently attributed to each of them in the literature on home-school discontinuities.

In Arviat and Qitiqliq two cultures are obviously in contact: the indigenous Inuit population and the southern cultures represented by the majority white Qallunaat teaching staff and administration, curriculum materials, and views on schooling. This is certainly what is most apparent to first-time travelers to northern communities. As an institution, Qitiqliq mirrors a visible Qallunaat school culture that seems at times intrusive when reflected against Inuit traditions. The challenge of making Qitiqliq, in the policy rhetoric of the NWT, "a true community school" that is attended by, supported by, and above all understood by the entire community, becomes more than obvious the longer one spends observing the daily local initiatives and efforts. Children learn here by observing and engaging in meaningful day-to-day lived, holistic activities such as hunting and skin preparations with apprenticed community members. Yet the instructional language of mainstream schooling includes a vocabulary of measurement, standards, objectives, targets and benchmarks, rules and regulations. However, if learning is conceptualized as seeing and making connections, the concept of an inquiry curriculum with its ideas of interconnectedness, discovery, and application has potential for changing mainstream schools and classrooms in northern communities (Moll, 1990; Maguire, in press).

This is an obvious challenge in Arviat where some members of the community are still ambivalent about both the economic and inherent value of schooling itself. Schooling is just one of the many institutions that disturbs the traditional ecology of this environment and the equilibrium of community life. It becomes an explicit challenge when set against the rhetoric of the national debate about education that expresses skepticism about the abilities even of schools with well-established school traditions, physical structures, and formal institutional systems, policies, and procedures to prepare students adequately for the 21st century. It is indeed a personal challenge when viewed from the realities of the lived situations of individuals and different social groups' cultural frames of reference at the local level.

Day-to-day experiences in Arviat and Qitiqliq involve both the staff and community members negotiating between two worlds, Inuit and Qallunaat, and two languages, English and Inuktitut. People have different expectations and experiences of teaching and learning. For example, some members of the community, like the former chair of the Community Education Committee Thomas Suluk, believe that "students have to live a dual life: life in the community and life in the school." Others, like school counselor Peter Alareak, see the school as becoming more positive in "giving praise to students." Some Qallunaat teachers see the problem as "one of Inuit members of the community understanding what the school is all about." Others, like Mike Shouldice of Arctic College, see "the task as one of modernizing without southernizing." Ironically, as some of the junior secondary teachers attempt to move toward a more holistic, integrated curriculum with flexible groupings of students (which is more in keeping with Inuit ways of learning),

some parents who are beginning to see the discursive practices of schools want the traditional signs of mainstream schooling such as grades and marks to be maintained.

The greatest challenge in dealing with cultural representation and school success lies in finding a common discourse that goes across and/or intersects with cultural borders and shifting cultural frames of reference. It is the challenge for Arviat as a human community, in a sometimes physically hostile environment, attempts to fit new experiences with schooling into the framework of its old customs, beliefs, and traditions. It is a challenge as well for a Qallunaat community with a particular view of schooling to preserve its own well-established formal structures and beliefs about education while responding to new demands for innovation and accountability and pressures from critical theorists to respect cultural differences. Students' symbolic representations (e.g., texts, maps, stories) provided another methodological tool to understand not only the intertwined complexities, but the possibilities for adding the voices of youth to discussions about education practice and policy (Maguire, 1994).

A most striking sign of students in this school living two cultures, negotiating sociocultural borders and boundaries, is the colorful display of students' work entitled "Invent a Watch" that hangs outside a junior secondary classroom on the second floor. Their representations show two cultures in contact and a wide range among the students in their interpretations of prices, symbolic forms for marketing, artistic expression, and concept of time as illustrated in Table 2.

We see a touch of irony in this display as students invent multiple configurations for representing and keeping track of time at a same time as there is pressure and urgency for them to get to school on time and to move from there to college and university. They come from a culture where precision in time is not a valuable commodity. Yet punctuality is a frequently articulated topic at assemblies, in teachers' classrooms, and in staff room discourse, and it is an explicit, expected institutional social convention. Bulletin boards also give students positive messages (Lev Curely returned and is very eager to continue his program. Good for you Lev) and remind them of their responsibilities (Be Punctual, Respect Yourself and Others; Work Hard and Bring Your Things to Class), and display Stay-in-School posters such as "The Future can be bright" and "You will go far if you stay in school." The explicit message is that success is viewed as a concept for everyone. How it is defined and valued here, especially in the light of the economic uncertainty described above, certainly varies.

Particularly striking are not only the competing and parallel visions of schooling, but also the differences between the formal and informal structures for how teaching and learning are played out. For example, Qallunaat ways of communicating and operating are largely text-based, relying on institutional documents such as memos, faxes, and minutes of meetings. Formal structures are mirrored in the school cultural artifacts of schooling, such as procedures and deadlines for completing forms, tracking students' progress and attendance, establishing formal reporting mechanisms for students' grades, evaluating and measuring students' achievement through report cards, tests, and checklists. The language of the formal structures includes a vocabulary of measurement standards and objectives: benchmarks, targets, baselines, and indicators are the cultural markers of institutionalized schooling and constitute the conceptual frame teachers are encouraged to embrace. At Qitiqliq, these cultural artifacts of the institution of schooling exist alongside the informal ways in which the school itself is run and Inuit cultural ways of knowing and doing that teachers are encouraged to support and promote in implementing the Inuit curriculum Innuqatagiit. Notes are rarely taken of decisions made, even at formal meetings. Sometimes it can be hard to find even the traditional cultural tools of a text-based society such as a pencil or pen on

Table 2
Student Project Display: Invent a Watch

Less than $20	*Less than $100*	*More than $100*	*Priceless*
Hockey Puck Watch 2.99 each	My name is White Owl It costs $21.32	Magic Falling in Love watch $200	A TV watch
Dog Watch (with a Figure labeled Nike) $5.90 plus tax 3.22 p.m. digital	The Eyeball watch $25.00 (ad for teachers special)	The necklace watch with a 100% carat gold. Asking Prices $250. Yours—available at the Northern Store	Eye clock made in Arviat by Annie Kaayak Feb/22/94
Gold Doyler Clock Company $7.98	The World Earring Watch $22.98	$5000.00 for Super Watch	Story Watch $762,000,000.00
Time Watch .99¢	Pencil Watch for $30.00	Golden Pulsar $155.99 + tax	Watch proof
Jelly wrist watch it costs $5.99	Watch from High School Jello It costs $45.99		
Belt watch $9.50	Eye Watch $13.00		

the secretary's or administrator's desks. Yet students are encouraged to bring such cultural tools to class.

Conflicts in values between community members and school systems are not new issues in Aboriginal education. On the one hand, Harris (1990) proposes a two-way exchange of knowledge and schooling as fundamental to Aboriginal cultural maintenance in Australia. Although he recognizes the importance of local control, he advocates keeping the two cultural domains, home and school, distinctly separate. On the other hand, Holm and Holm (1990) describe the positive impact of the Rock Point Navajo community-controlled school on student achievement and self esteem. Stairs (1991) proposes a cultural maintenance model. Others like Cummins (1993), Moll (1990), and Jacob and Jordan (1993) challenge deficit models of cultural differences. Although theorists offer different solutions and perspectives, students are also grappling with the issues. However, their concerns are seldom the focus of discussion in mainstream research agendas (Maguire, 1994).

Students' Textual Representations as Culturally Expressive Works

In the literature on Aboriginal education, there is a dearth of research that examines what opportunities and cultural encounters mean from students' perspectives. The problem of cultural representation, then, is more pivotal when considering Qitiqliq students' views about the sociocultural possibilities and future prospects that they see for themselves in Arviat and the larger Inuit community of the NWT. Some adolescents have their own children to consider as part of their responsibilities in meeting the learning challenge. The results of the community event indicate that posing questions that are not usually engaged by individuals is not necessarily negative. This can be a catalyst to get people thinking about issues and concerns that they might not have thought about before, as well as helping researchers to ask more sensible and culturally sensitive questions.

For example, a grade 12 student gave the following attributes for the successful student: "being on time, working all the time, having good time management and listening carefully." Although the meaning of the first three attributes was easy to interpret and locate, less so was the fourth. Listening emerged in many of the student interviews as the most frequent indicator of "being a successful student." The question arises: Do these students think that listening to teachers is important because this is what

they have been taught as a norm for cultural membership in the Qallunaat school system, or because listening is the way they are socialized into the families and this settlement?

The sociocultural and personal worlds of adolescents, especially Aboriginal adolescents, can be largely invisible to adults who parachute into northern communities with a priori observational schemes that reflect westernized ways of looking and observing. In our observation, Qitiqliq students are explicitly told that their quality of life will be enhanced by education. Tapping their views on school success, their personal hopes and expectations, provided us with a number of methodological dilemmas. Although we realized that the evidentiary basis of our interpretations will always be incomplete, tapping students' viewpoints signals the complexity and importance of conducting inquiries and genuinely interacting with students rather than treating them as objects of study.

Although the use of formal interviews to capture students' viewpoints provided some insights into their thinking, at the same time they proved limiting. One commonality across all student interviews was a tendency to view school and success in traditional, westernized ways in response to our questions. Many students described the requirements for school success to involve "working hard," "listening carefully," "finishing homework and assignments," and "being punctual." They appear to have internalized and explicitly repeat back the explicit school discourse as cultural frames of reference for being successful in school that can be linked to the systemic, cultural contexts of mainstream research and teaching practices.

More powerful strategies involved engaging students in informal conversations and inviting them to express themselves in writing about their concerns, dreams, and hopes. We collected and examined 64 samples of student writing that reflect varied cultural stances (Maguire, 1994). The variation among the students' written texts in and across classrooms with respect to topic selection and content allowed us to see how the students were positioning themselves in the cultures, languages, school, and settlement. They also provided important information concerning what cultural resources they were drawing on, as well as what cultural frames of references they seem to be constructing, as illustrated in the following excerpts from the textual representations of two students.

Hopes and Expectations

When I'm no longer in school, I expect to become a Police Officer or an Electrician. These two jobs really interest me because they are challenging, risk taking jobs. If I ever get one of these jobs, I would work up here in the North. I could see native people. I would like to help them as much as possible. I would like to work in the North where I can keep my traditions. I would go out hunting on weekends because hunting is the best things I like to do. To become a Police Officer, I would have to go to Regina for training. If I pass, I would work here in Arviat, clean this place up with my friends. Police Officers are being transferred to different communities after a few years but I wouldn't mind. If I wanted to stay here, I would apply to become an electrician. My grandmother said that I'm going to get her H.A.P. house when I'm a little bit older, so I would probably want a job here in Arviat where all my friends are here.

My First Caribou

In 1991, I shot the first caribou of my life. The caribou was dead. I went home and my caribou is dead today. It was good first caribou. My Dad was happy. I ate it in my home. After eating caribou I also ate it in soup and bannock. After I took the skin off. I gave the skins to my Mom and my Mom was happy.

In these students' writings, which are viewed as culturally expressive works (Maguire, 1995), we see different cultural forums (school, home, community) intersecting, and the different cultural encounters emerging in their adolescent consciousness as they write about their ways of living. A feeling of tentativeness permeates their texts. These little "epiphanies of the ordinary" (Maguire, 1991), momentary insights into the worlds of Qitiqliq secondary students, also emerged from our informal conversations with them. They tended to occur at impromptu times (e.g., before or after class, after school, changing books at a locker) and in different situations (e.g., classrooms, hallways, job shadowing). An open bench area in the front hall was one popular area for observing and listening to Qitiqliq students engaging in peer social work and establishing their own connections, making sense of their environment, and discovering an interactional stage with their peers and others as illustrated in the following conversational exchange.

Conversational Exchange: It's the rules. What about girls in the south?

It's 4:00 p.m. Three girls sit in the bench area.

Student 1: My name is X. What are you doing?

Interviewer: We have been told that this is a very good school and we are asking people about the school, especially the kids who go here. What do you think?

Student 1: It's the rules. You are expected to respect the school and people in it and do your best. If you don't, you fail. It's a very clean school. Do you think it is a clean school? What are schools like in the south?

Interviewer: Some are big and some can be small.

Student 1: Do all girls in the south finish school?

Interviewer: I think most do now.

St. 1. I'm going to finish and be a teacher.

Interviewer: What do you girls want to do when you finish school?

Student 2: I want a job in an organization.

Interviewer: What do you think you will have to do to get these kinds of jobs?

Student 1: I'll need training. I might go to Arctic College or maybe to university or college in the south. In my CALM class I had to teach little kids in the elementary school and really liked the experience.

Interviewer: And you? (long pause but interviewer waits)

St. 2. I like to organize things. Get training. We can get training at the Northern store when we do job works.

Student 1: Do girls in Montreal have babies and go to school?

Interviewer: Most girls finish school before they have babies, but some do not.

Student 1: What do they do with their babies? Do those who have babies finish school? What about girls in the south?

The students' social work that we observed and heard by taking conversational side roads at the beginning and end of the day in their circular bench area served many functions. These included a curiosity to explore a different culture, an expression of an attitude or feeling of self-confidence or engaging in cultural dialogues, inquiry and self-exploration or curiosity about "girls in the south." The bench area became a mediating tool and venue for opening up communicative space, ensuring that students' views were heard and that the contexts in which they live were better understood. One of the senior secondary students who is also a parent believes that Shared Care provided her with the kinds of learning experiences that allow her to enter the job market and to give back to the community.

> Shared care made it possible for me to come back to school. I was two years out of school. Shared Care is good and my baby is happy there. I have two boys in Shared Care.... There are two workers there and 15 kids in Shared Care.

We draw attention to Shared Care, a well-equipped facility that provides a service for young mothers as well as an environment for young children's socialization and learning, because many of the current senior students attending Qitiqliq school are also parents. It is their concerns and sociocultural challenges that must become the agenda for discussion and dialogue about harnessing social and economic resources for teaching and learning.

An Agenda for Discussion: Researchers' Actions and Their Texts

In the introduction we describe Qitiqliq Secondary School and Arviat as being in transition. Although we attempted to understand the meaning of school success and experienced our own difficulties in understanding and representing cultural differences, for Arviat the question remains: How should education be delivered to this and the next generation of students? It is as much a sociocultural challenge as it is a political, economic, and pedagogical one. The NWT vision of education as a shared responsibility and transforming process, as represented in public documents, required us to look back and look ahead. Cultural frames of reference are constructed and changed by the particular nested contexts from which they emerge. The establishment and maintenance of a culture-based school is dependent on a strong sense of ownership and commitment from people. Schools and communities are places that have the potential of becoming positive forces for dealing with cultural and educational change. They are cultural sites where Aboriginal customs, language(s), and the means of communicating and finding expression for them have the best chance of survival (Pool, 1994).

Qitiqliq secondary school and Arviat are places where the landscape of education and cultural frames of reference continue to change. Two constant factors in this change process are the need to create employment and to be able to take care of themselves in the hamlet without necessarily leaving it, and the importance of finding other ways to be contributing members of the community. Two cultures are in contact and as such impinge on one another in complex ways. Members of this school and hamlet move back and forth between Inuit and Qallunaat traditions. An Inuit teacher from the elementary school who has joined the staff of Qitiqliq made the following observation in the staff room, where many implicit cultural encounters occur: "She (referring to a Qallunaat teacher) eats raw meat and I drink a Coca Cola." Just as nested contexts suggest shifting borders (Haig-Brown, 1995), so does the negotiation of cultural differences suggest shifting frames of reference.

When we returned to the school and community to report back on our case study, we found a positive ethos and willingness to work together. Inuit readers of our research report found it to be an "accurate" representation of Qitiqliq Secondary and the hamlet of Arviat—their tensions in negotiating cultural frames of references and adapting to new technology, and their challenges in preparing students for the future. They named the report Attautsikut/Together. Reflecting back we see this "research text" as a textual representation that is necessarily incomplete. It is a representation of our best interpretations in a particular time and circumstance.

Culture can be attributed to a particular group of people, but a cultural identity is enacted by individuals engaging in particular social activities (Maguire, 1994). There are many relational possibilities for understanding cultural encounters, cultural differences, and cultural frames of references in both the school and the settlement. Longevity in the research site does give researchers a better appreciation of how this is accomplished on a daily basis. The idea of sponsoring an education event, an important research strategy,

served many functions. It was a useful way to link school and community, to grasp the varied perspectives of teachers, students, and parents and to help us appreciate how two cultures come to understand and negotiate one another's cultural frames of reference, discursive practices, and traditions through conversational exchanges and dialogues about education.

This suggests to us that schools and communities—like classrooms—are not fixed, static entities, but changing and dynamic places. We return to Albert, who gave us permission to share his story about going south, which we included in the earlier section of this article. Looking back, he feels his story is "about turning things around ... I have done that so far. Education is the future. It's made me realize what I've learned in the past ... many accomplishments and much learning. I have turned my life around." Respect for life and for people are two major themes in the new Inuuqatagiit curriculum that were discussed by the elders during a workshop where we shared the results of the case study with the community. As one elder, Casmir, commented, "It is in the Inuit spirit to respect life and not to give up." Certainly conversational exchanges rather than formal interviews proved to be more useful research strategies for accessing and understanding students' shifting cultural frames of reference, identities, hopes, and expectations. Giving authority and voice to students' personal discourses in our textural representations helps to extend interactive teaching practices in classrooms and communities to the contexts of our research inquiries. It is a recursive process of working and learning together.

Notes

1. We thank Jo-ann Archibald of the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia for suggesting the idea of conducting this social forum—a community meeting for tapping members' views of schooling, views of success and this northern-based community school that has a mandate to deliver a culturally responsive curriculum alongside the Alberta curriculum.
2. Community means different things. In this article, it describes a collectivity of individuals, for example, a community of teachers. To describe a shared sense of belonging, we use community, for example, I feel part of a community. We use the word *hamlet* or *village* for the physical community, unless inappropriate, for example, community-based school. Qallunaat is an Inuit term frequently used to refer to English speaking southerners. It is also spelled Kablanatt. The different spellings reflect the dialect variations of Inuktitut that exist in northern communities.
3. Mainstream is a term that is frequently invoked by cultural and critical theorists interested in critical pedagogy, cultural studies, and critical ethnography (Cummins, 1993; Giroux, 1988; McCarthy & Critchlow, 1993; Quantz, 1992). They argue that schools are controlled by a dominant culture that mirrors and reproduces the values and norms of that dominant culture, thereby creating inequitable learning environments for culturally silenced, marginalized groups. This important body of research calls for more collaborative egalitarian research and teaching practices in examining cultural representation in schools and communities. We argue that the relationship between mainstream and marginalized groups is not straightforward and that terms like *mainstream* and *Eurocentric* are equally problematic and context-specific. What cultural representation means and how it gets expressed are influenced by complex contextual factors that mediate cultural frames of reference in explicit and implicit ways in particular situations.
4. Educators here refer to a number of published documents that articulate the new directions, general policies and aims of culture-based schooling in the Northwest Territories. Some examples are Department of Education (1992, 1991).

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Grandy's River Collegiate: Can a Rural School Survive in an Urban Landscape?

Grandy's River Collegiate, a rural high school in Newfoundland, is faced with the possibility of closure, as it is unable to meet the criteria for viability proposed by the provincial Department of Education. This article asks how this can happen to a school that is deemed exemplary and is a source of pride in the local community. The issue is seen as a rural education issue, as conflict between rural and urban values. The analysis reveals the importance of context in determining what is a successful school and the need for provincial educational reformers to consider multiple approaches in the delivery of education.

L'école secondaire Grandy's River Collegiate située dans une communauté rurale en Terre-Neuve fait face à la possibilité de fermer ses portes puisqu'elle ne peut plus atteindre les critères de viabilité tels que proposés par le Ministère de l'éducation provincial. Cet article questionne comment une telle école reconnue exemplaire et source de fierté chez les gens de la communauté locale, peut subir un tel sort. En plus de paraître comme étant une question d'éducation rurale, il semblerait que c'est également une question de conflit entre les valeurs rurales et urbaines. Les analyses révèlent l'importance du contexte lorsqu'on détermine ce qu'est une école qui fait preuve de succès et que les réformateurs et réformatrices en éducation provinciale devraient considérer multiples approches à l'éducation offerte en milieu rural.

Grandy's River Collegiate is a small, rural central high school, chosen in 1993 as one of the 21 schools included in the Canadian Education Association's Exemplary Schools Project. In the school year it was studied (1993-1994), it had 243 students in grades 7-12. It had a staff of 15 teachers, which included the Principal, Vice-Principal, and two itinerant teachers (in French and guidance) who were shared with other schools. It is a public school, operated by the provincial Department of Education, serving two Newfoundland fishing communities, Rose Blanche and Burnt Islands. Both of these communities have been adversely affected by the cod moratorium, which means that the current economic outlook for both communities is bleak (Brown, 1994). It is a rural high school, sitting on a scenic site that is 3km outside one community, and 13km outside the other, which means that all students travel to and from school by bus. Although it is located in a sparsely populated area and some might call it small, it is not a small school according to the definition used by the Newfoundland Department of Education, which defines a school where senior high school courses are provided as small if the mean grade enrollment is 25 students or fewer (Press, 1992). In 1994-1995 the mean grade enrollment at Grandy's River Collegiate was 39, meaning that the school could not avail itself of special teacher allocations for small schools.

Why was this school chosen for the Exemplary Schools Project? The most compelling reason was the school's obvious success at keeping students in school until they graduated. Since the school opened in 1977, the dropout rate had decreased from a high of 59.1% in the late 1970s to 0% in the early 1990s. Although the study revealed that other factors, such as changing parental attitudes toward education and changing employ-

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ment trends, were certainly at work in reducing the dropout rate, the school must be credited for much of this success. The case study revealed that the staff at the school have struggled to create conditions such that students want to stay in school until they graduate. They have also offered a wide range of courses. There are sufficient honors-level courses to allow the students who are the strongest academically to meet the requirements to graduate with honors, while at the same time providing prevocational or general level courses so that the academically weaker students may meet basic graduation requirements.

This was not, however, the only reason that Grandy's River Collegiate was chosen. Other significant characteristics make this school distinctive. These include the global-environmental focus of the school; the high level of community support; the high level of student involvement in school activities and social action; and the caring, student-focused climate. Combined, these characteristics make the school distinctive and a source of pride for the students, parents, and the communities it serves.

The Context

Despite this success and the local pride, the existence of Grandy's River Collegiate is threatened. On January 4, 1996 the provincial government announced that it would proceed with legislation providing for a major restructuring of the education system in Newfoundland. The restructuring is seen as the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Education completed in 1992. It touches on all aspects of education and includes a massive consolidation of school boards (to 10 from the current 27) and schools (the intent is to close 100 schools). Although in some instances the intent is to eliminate duplication of schools in a community, in many instances a rural community will lose its only school. Although this legislation has not been passed, there has been considerable discussion, and drafts of the proposed legislation and regulations have been distributed to educational stakeholders (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1996a).

In the proposed new legislation, Section 69(3), reference is made to a "viable school." Viability is defined in the proposed regulations:

> 3. (1) An established school is viable if the average total enrolment for the school for the 3 previous years on September 30 is not less than a base total enrolment for the school calculated at a rate of
>
> (a) 20 students per grade for kindergarten to grade 6;
> (b) 25 students per grade for grades 7 to 9; and
> (c) 40 students per year group for Levels I to III. (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1996b, p. 2)

Based on this definition, the senior high school grades (Levels I-III) at Grandy's River Collegiate are not within the viability guidelines, because the mean enrollment is lower than 40. In 1994-1995, the total enrollment in Levels I-III was 117, rather than the required 120. Even considering the lower requirements needed in grades 7-9, the school's viability is threatened; given the current enrollment statistics, with no loss of students enrollment by the year 2000 will be 80 students, which is just five above minimal requirements. And, given the general population trends, it is unlikely that new students will transfer in, but probable that some students will transfer out.

The two elementary schools feeding Grandy's River Collegiate are also threatened, and the only chance of having a local elementary school in the region is to combine the two elementary schools (K-6), perhaps by transporting all students to Grandy's River Collegiate. Both communities will then lose their only school. To accommodate elementary students and implement the viability guidelines, Grandy's River Collegiate would most logically become a K-9 school and senior students would probably be transported

to a larger school located 32 km. away. Even if this exact legislation is not passed and there is some revision to the guidelines, it is clear that provincial guidelines and planned reforms threaten the existence of all three schools currently in the area. A decision to consolidate schools and bus students would be unpopular with the residents of the communities and bitterly opposed by parents.

Besides labeling them as small or viable, the Department of Education has also tried to define schools as "good" and "effective." In a background paper for the Newfoundland Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, Secondary Education, Press (1992), a Department of Education official, identifies the "characteristics generally agreed upon as reflecting good, effective schools" (p. 528). He identifies the usual characteristics summarized from the effective schools research, such as high expectations, academic achievement, individualized instruction, time-on-task, and an orderly, supportive school climate. He follows this with a discussion of school size. He concludes that "the school size debate is inconclusive" (p. 529). However, because the government had to establish a maximum desirable school size, guidelines were established. Although he cautions that other factors must be considered, these guidelines indicate that for primary and elementary schools two streams are most effective. Based on average class sizes not exceeding 30 students per grade per stream, this makes for a maximum enrollment of 420 students for a K-6 school. In the junior high grades, three streams (or 90 students) per grade are suggested as optimal. For high schools, the guidelines state:

> Newfoundland's high schools need to be large enough to offer a wide curriculum and a host of extra-curricular activities but still small enough to provide a good atmosphere for learning and a sense of belonging for students and staff. Thus, the range of 500-800 students is suggested as optimal, with an enrollment ceiling of 900 students. (p. 530)

According to government guidelines, Grandy's River Collegiate is too big to be considered a small school, and yet too small to be considered effective or optimal. If it were considered a small school, it could avail itself of special staffing provisions and hire additional staff. If enrollments dropped so that there were nine or fewer students in a course, the school could avail itself of distance education delivery for advanced mathematics and physics courses through the Newfoundland Department of Education. But it is too big to qualify for either category. However, the school is not nearly large enough to approach the optimal figures (243 students rather than the 500-800 suggested). By stretching its resources to the limit, the school in 1994-1995 offered 47 courses (a low number when compared with the 90-100 courses offered in larger schools). The future of Grandy's River Collegiate appears to be a short one, for it illustrates the general situation described by Nachtigal (1992):

> Because rural high schools are for the most part smaller than urban schools and cannot offer the wide range of courses offered in larger systems, they are seen as second best. To get better, they must get bigger, therefore school consolidation is always lurking just around the corner. (p. 73)

There is a lack of empirical evidence to support this assumption about bigness (Hertzog & Pittman, 1995; Sher, 1995; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). As Nachtigal (1992) points out, "The bigger-is-better belief continues in spite of the lack of evidence that it is true" (p. 81). He cites empirical studies by Guthrie (1980), supported by Clark (1989), that:

> Though there certainly exists no definitive study regarding the effects of organizational scale upon schooling outcomes, there is sufficient evidence to suggest

> that the quality of school life for students is not always made better by attending schools that are bigger. At the least, from available research findings, one would have to counsel school decision makers to examine closely their motives for consolidating or closing small schools, be they situated in rural or urban settings. (Nachtigal, 1992, p. 81)

These findings were shared by other reviewers of research on school size (Newton & Newton, 1992; Press, 1992; Riggs, 1987). Why, then, the persistence of this belief in bigger being better and the push for the consolidation of schools? The answer may be found in the summary of research related to school size and finance (Riggs, 1987). Riggs found that studies generally agree that small schools have higher per-pupil costs than large schools. However, as he points out, this finding might be misleading because costs are based on pupil-teacher ratios only. When transportation is included in the determination of overall educational costs in rural areas, the savings "from consolidation tends to decrease markedly or vanish altogether" (pp. 10-11).

A report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1994) suggests that, in measuring the effect that the size of the school has on the overall costs of education, other than costs relating to pupil-teacher ratios and transportation, factors that must be considered are: the cost of the building and its equipment, running costs, and costs related to ancillary services. It describes a policy of the Dutch government, which reflects a consciousness of both the costs and the quality of education, summarized in the phrase, "large schools if possible, small schools if needed" (p. 21).

Riggs (1987) wonders whether one ought to question higher per-pupil costs of rural schools. He draws on an article by Sher (1985) entitled "Education's Ugly Duckling: Rural Schools in Urban Nations." In assessing the value of rural schools, his comment appears to be as relevant today as it was 10 years ago:

> We must constantly ask ourselves, "compared with what?" For instance, compared to the cost of gathering enough children to have an urban-sized school in a remote rural area (via boarding arrangements or daily transportation) today's rural school is a bargain. (p. 12)

The new legislation proposed by the Newfoundland government (Section 27), also introduces school councils for every school, composed of parents, teachers, community members, and in the case of secondary schools, students. Because Grandy's River Collegiate has strong support from the community and the parents, this provision looks promising if parents want to resist consolidation and bussing. However, the purpose of such councils is clearly defined:

> 28. (1) The purpose of a school council is to develop, encourage and promote policies, practices and activities to enhance the quality of school programs and the level of student achievement in the school. (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, pp. 18-19)

The purpose is, therefore, for councils to support existing schools. They are not given the right and responsibility to decide which schools should be closed and which should be created. That right rests with school boards. The voices of parents and community members in school boards will probably become weaker with the new legislation, because school boards will be consolidated and therefore become larger. The proposed legislation provides clear directions to schools regarding the establishment, maintenance, and operation of schools in sparsely populated areas:

> A board shall establish, maintain and operate a public school only if the school is viable as prescribed by regulation and as a result, no other school in the district is made non-viable. (Section 69 (1), p. 37).

Boards are given the right to make exceptions if the school is in an isolated community, or if there are "extenuating circumstances warranting an exception" (Section 69(2)(b), p. 38). However, *isolated* is defined in the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Act (1996a):

> For the purposes of this section, an "isolated community" is a community not connected to other communities by road or, if connected by road, where transportation of students cannot be provided that would satisfy the transportation requirements prescribed by regulation. (Section 69(3), p. 38)

The rural area being discussed is along the southwest coast of the island of Newfoundland. It is connected by a secondary highway, Route 409, which begins at Port-aux-Basques, the largest town in the region and the local service center, with a population of approximately 5,000 people. Twenty miles east on Route 409 is the community of Isle-aux-Morte, which in 1991 had a population of 1,146. Burnt Islands (population of 1,024) is 12 km. east, and 15 km. beyond is Rose Blanche (population 918), literally the end of the road. The nearest airport is a five-hour drive away; there is limited access to goods and services in the local area (some services, such as libraries or hospitals, are located at Port-aux-Basques). However, according to the definition of an isolated community in Section 69(3) above, neither community served by the school can be so designated because the two communities are connected to other communities by road, and if necessary students can be transported by bus to another school in the time specified by the regulations.

In Grandy's River Collegiate's case, unless there is a major change in government thinking, consolidation is indeed just around the corner. If this occurs, there will be a major clash of values between educational reformers and local community residents. The rest of this article analyzes what these values are and shows that there is a clash of values, that the values held by the parents are in conflict with values endorsed by the current efforts at educational reform. It shows the importance of context in defining a "good" school, and reveals some of the dilemmas inherent in the governance of rural schools. It concludes by examining the future prospects facing not only Grandy's River Collegiate, but other rural schools.

A Clash of Values

When attempting to change a system, educational reformers need to understand the context and culture of the school, whether that school is located in an urban or a rural area (Fullan, 1993). The Grandy's River Collegiate case study revealed images of three different types of schools, each with a distinctive culture and strong values. It is possible to imagine them along a continuum. At one end is the small, multigrade church school (the traditional schools that existed prior to Grandy's River Collegiate); in the center is the integrated school (Grandy's River Collegiate); at the other end is the consolidated school (the goal of current government reform). Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of each type.

The Small, Multigrade Church School

Most of the parents of the students at Grandy's River Collegiate and a majority of the teachers attended small, multigrade church schools in their own communities. Rose Blanche and Burnt Islands both had small church schools until the opening of Grandy's River Collegiate in 1977. In such schools students were held close to the traditions of the community. In Burnt Islands and Rose Blanche the small schools were Anglican church schools, for the residents along this coastline were almost all of English descent, and almost all were members of the Anglican Church of Canada. Schools and church were seen as united and were generally close together, physically as well as philosophically.

Table 1
Three Types of School

Small, Multigrade Church School	*Integrated School*	*Consolidated School*
Students and teachers close to local traditions.	Students held to present values.	Students and teachers oriented to future, renounces the past, and aims to acquire a new way of life.
Deep roots in the community.	A homogeneous, unified community.	No deep roots in community.
Local traditions respected.	A broader scale of local values.	Values reflect the larger society, local traditions rejected.
Students generally follow in parents' path.	Students seen as following a pattern of natural selection (some go on to higher education, others don't).	Students encouraged to move to postsecondary institutions and toward nontraditional careers.
Teachers and home share values, teachers almost like family.	Teachers respected and known in the community.	Teachers and home separated, teachers generally not known in the community.
Stability valued over change.	Stability a dominant feature. No pressure for upward mobility.	Need for mobility, change, and progress.
Little attention to the future, focus on the past.	Students close to the past, but comfortable with the future. Focus is on the present.	Focus on the future, the past is deemphasized or rejected.

Teachers were expected to be church leaders and were often lay readers in the church as well as teachers. The school had deep roots in the community, and local traditions were respected. Many teachers were young and boarded with local families in the community. Some were from local families and returned home to teach. It was a stable community and the school reflected this stability. Most young men expected to follow in their fathers' footsteps and fish; many young women expected to marry and be full-time housewives or else work in the local fish plant. Education was not seen as important by many because they knew that they could make good livings, as their families already did, through the fishing industry, and they knew they did not need to graduate from high school to do that.

During this period the school dropout rate was extremely high. Many older students combined school with part-time work at the local fish plant, rushing to work as soon as school finished and working sometimes until midnight or even later. There was no difficulty getting employment in the fishing industry, although some decided to become sailors on Great Lakes freighters, and a number enlisted in the Canadian armed forces. It is not, therefore, surprising that, according to figures from the 1991 Census data, 45.5% of the residents of Burnt Islands and 39.9% of the residents of Rose Blanche have less than a grade 9 education (Brown, 1994).

The early years spent in this type of school had a significant influence on how parents later viewed education and judged the success of the schooling their children received. At Grandy's River Collegiate, what parents consider as indicators of a successful school is based on their own school experiences. There are few newcomers to the community, and most parents compare Grandy's River with the schools they attended. They know that their children have much better schooling than they themselves had. They appreciate the personal attention and extra help given to their children, and their

assessment of the school is based almost exclusively on these qualities. Few have experience with other school systems, and the few who did felt they compared unfavorably with Grandy's River (too big, too impersonal, not caring enough). There is considerable pride in the school among both parents and students. The high school graduation is a major community event, and there is strong financial support for school activities, particularly the graduation activities and the sports teams.

Yet an outsider might notice deficiencies in the program that Grandy's River Collegiate offers its students. For example, there is no art program or music program. The science lab and the computer lab both need equipment and resources. The school's library is inadequate, and there is no library program that teaches the students the skills of independent research. Facilities and programs found in the larger high school in Port-aux-Basques are undoubtedly superior, as some teachers in the school pointed out. Yet neither the parents nor the community saw the absence of such facilities or programs as a sign that the school is lacking, or that it is not as successful as perhaps it ought to be. Instead, parents boasted of their school and took great pride in it.

The most plausible explanation for this is that because the parents have never known such programs, they have no sense of what is missing. Definitions of successful schooling for most parents are tied directly to their past experiences with schools and to what they now perceive as necessary to improve their own children's chances of getting jobs. For this reason they will not pressure the school to improve the arts program, the library, or the science and computer labs unless it can be shown that this is relevant to current employment opportunities.

Teachers and administrators also seem to accept such a situation. The small church-school images linger. For many of the teachers and parents, Grandy's River is seen as a major improvement over what used to be available in terms of facilities, courses, and teachers, as indeed it is. To expect more seems unrealistic. If the arts, a modern school library, computer facilities, or up-to-date science labs are seen by provincial or district policymakers as necessary for a successful school, then there must be external encouragement and support to overcome the legacy of the village school.

The Integrated School: Grandy's River Collegiate

When Grandy's River Collegiate opened, students from Rose Blanche and Burnt Islands were brought together for the first time. Although they were separated by only 15 km., road links were built only in the late 1960s, so the normal method of transport between the two communities was by boat. Each town had its own church and school, so young people had few opportunities to meet others outside their own communities. One parent who had attended the church school in Burnt Islands commented that when she went to school, there were few opportunities to meet students from other neighboring communities. One of the things she valued about Grandy's River Collegiate was that her children had a larger group to socialize with, that it broadened their experiences. In some ways Grandy's River remained like the small church schools, for the two communities were similar. However, there were differences, and by bringing the students from the two communities together, some diversity was created in a unified school community.

Overwhelmingly what parents liked about Grandy's River Collegiate was the evidence that the teachers cared about students. Parents had immense respect for the principal and staff. Care, personal knowledge of the student, the willingness to give students extra help if they needed it—these were the qualities that parents noted and admired in teachers. All the parents interviewed wanted their children to do well, but they seemed to believe that the school could only do so much, that it was up to the student as well. They respected the teachers and left school matters to them. There was little formal contact between parents and teachers other than at the scheduled parent-

teacher conferences. There was no home and school association. There was, however, a high degree of trust, a belief that teachers and administrators would make the best decisions for students.

Parents did not feel alienated or isolated from the school, nor did they feel intimidated by or reluctant to contact teachers or administrators if there was a problem. One parent commented, "Well, if there's something you're not sure about, just pick up the phone." They also felt confident that if their children were having problems the school would contact them. Because most parents were satisfied with their children's progress, they saw no real need to talk to the school's staff or attend meetings. This was not due to lack of interest in education; it was simply that parents saw no need. In their view the principal and teachers knew what they were doing, and they had no desire to try to change things. The school was fine as it was.

Although parents and students are now concerned about the future, improving one's employability rather than a desire for higher education is the motivation for many students staying in school until graduation. Few students or parents see opportunities in the local area. When asked, no students interviewed for the case study thought they would be working and living in the area in five years' time. Several hastened to add, "It's not that we don't want to, we'd love to. But there's nothing for us. There's no jobs" (Brown, 1994, p. 121).

The data available on student career aspirations indicated that the majority of students who attended Grandy's River Collegiate were interested in attending technical colleges or community colleges rather than universities. The overall impression was that most enjoyed living in their home communities and would be content to stay there, doing the kinds of work that such a life could provide. Many, like the young man quoted below, wished they could find work in the traditional fishery, as their parents had:

> I know one thing, if there were jobs here now and I knew I could get out of school and get a job, I'd be gone tomorrow. I need it [high school graduation] now, but before, like I'm saying, if the fishery was still good I'd be gone just to get a job. Now there's nothing out there, there's no other choice but to get an education, so that's why I'm going to do it. (Brown, 1994, p. 18)

Students like this one would be content with the life his community offers as long as he could get a job, any job. He is not concerned about upward mobility or what may be seen by some as progress. He has no desire to travel, to live elsewhere. Like many of his classmates, he has a strong sense of place, a feeling of belonging to the town and the area. Many love the sea and are already accomplished sailors. Some of the young men are experienced woodsmen and enjoy excursions into the open country. Many families own snowmobiles or all-terrain vehicles and enjoy sports fishing and camping. Some students have mechanical skills and are already capable mechanics and carpenters. In a social studies class observed for the Grandy's River case study (Brown, 1994), the female students suggested that a quilt might be sewn together as a class project. These students are close to their past and comfortable with a future that allows them to hold onto traditional and present values. They are not driven by concerns to prepare for the future as much as they are by the present—getting a job now.

The Consolidated School: The Model for Government Reform

What, then, about the model of schooling typified in the proposed government reform? It too is illustrated in the Grandy's River case study. Some parents and students in Grandy's River Collegiate have bought into the desire for high academic achievement and upward mobility that characterize this type of school. One third of the graduating class in 1993-1994 wanted to be prepared for university entrance. One such student, who

wanted to graduate with distinction or honors so that she could get into a veterinarian school, commented:

> Just a job is not good enough for me. I want a real job. A good one. Something where you'll get up in the morning and say, "I'm glad to go to work this morning," that, you know, you'll work really hard to get. Not saying, "Oh my, I got to go back there again today." (Brown, 1994, p. 128)

It is such students and their parents who may be willing to see the high school students transported to a larger center and the primary and elementary students transported out of the community. They may see this as the price they have to pay for a better education, but few will do so with a happy heart. One parent of a university-bound student in the graduating class noted sadly,

> I just hope that future students coming up in Grandy's will have the same opportunities that my kids have had there but I'm afraid that they're not going to get the same opportunities because of the cutbacks. And this is not going to be the fault of the principal or the teachers. This is going to be at the government level. (Brown, 1994, p. 115)

The government's plans for reform stress higher academic achievement and the values connected to it, such as university preparation and advanced courses in mathematics and the sciences. The opening statement in the introduction to the government's blueprint for reform, *Adjusting the Course* (Department of Education, 1993), is: "Our goal for education is to transform this society from one of persistent under-achievement to one whose achievement levels rank with the best in the nation" (p. 1). The educational program is seen as preparing students to be entrepreneurs and contributors to the provincial or national economy, for as *Adjusting the Course* goes on to state, "It has become increasingly evident that improved education is crucial to our social and economic well-being" (p. 1). These statements indicate a rejection of the past and the present (as an underachieving society in comparison, one assumes, with other societies), and a strong focus on preparation for the future. This conclusion was also expressed in *Our Children, Our Future* (Royal Commission, 1992):

> To a large degree, the education system in the coming years will be influenced by various global conditions over which we have little control.... They will force us to re-think everything, from how we organize our schools to how we teach our classes. To use an industrial metaphor, we will be forced to *retool* our schools to deal with new expectations for a new type of learner—one capable of responding to an ever-changing, post-industrial, high-technology age. Much of the public criticism of education, which has emanated to a large degree from the business community, has centred on the need for a graduate who is not so much a storehouse of knowledge but a manipulator of knowledge, capable of responding to personal, social and business needs. (p. 7)

Such a focus can tolerate little attachment to the local community and local concerns. Goals are national, or even international, and there is a sense of urgency in reaching them. Standardized tests scores are compared provincially, nationally, and internationally. The pressure is on schools like Grandy's River Collegiate to conform to this model and prepare students who can compete with the best anywhere, particularly in the areas of mathematics, language, and science. The principal of Grandy's River Collegiate despaired of such a movement. His entire career has been devoted to creating an awareness of broader values in his students. A committed environmentalist himself, he had hoped to have an influence on his students. In his final year before retirement he

was not optimistic about his success and worried about the values that the education system is advancing:

> The last, I would say ten years, I felt that the education in this school and in schools generally, it's terrible. I look at the final product. I don't just look at the grades. We've had good exam results but I think we send them out basically uneducated in key areas. Things that we need for the next generation. I shouldn't put it like that. We need it now but especially we need it in this post-industrial society. What's more basic than our resources, our air, our water or our fish and so on? Yet we abuse it right and left. And yet we have people leaving schools who have no ethic in these areas. They know mathematics. They know the capitals and they know this and they know that. It's an information-centred curriculum and we just haven't done the job. (Brown, 1994, p. 136)

The principal at Grandy's River Collegiate is not encouraged by the national and international trends in education, seeing too much emphasis being placed on mathematics and science, not enough on global issues, on caring for each other and the environment. He commented bitterly, "If we could make them all like the Japanese, you know (because they are supposed to have the highest skill levels in science and math and so on), all would be right with the world" (Brown, 1994, p. 137).

The urgency felt by provincial and national policymakers to compete internationally is not felt by the majority of parents in Burnt Islands and Rose Blanche. They want their children to find jobs and be happy; they are fearful of the uncertain future, but they are deeply rooted to their past and present and unwilling to turn their backs on who they are and the communities in which they live. Family life is important, and life revolves around family events and concerns. They are proud of their school and see no reason why their children cannot get a good education at Grandy's River. They would not want their children to attend a larger school in Port-aux-Basques, to be taught by strangers. They value the relationships that exist in their school between teachers and students, and they want this to continue. They want to maintain a local school that they can continue to trust and have pride in, a school staff that they feel knows them and their children. Although they want the best for their children, bigger does not mean better in this case.

The government's plan to involve parents in school councils for every school may work well in urban areas, because it would appeal to middle-class, urban parents who are generally active in bringing about social change. Brembeck (1971)[1] described such parents 25 years ago, and the description appears to be amazingly accurate even today:

> New suburbanites are prone to change from the beginning. Unlike the citizens of Midwest who had roots deep in the community, the citizens of the suburbs cut their former roots. The intentional decision to cut himself [sic] off from his former home and take another step up the social ladder expresses the suburbanite's protest and his plans for the future. He knows why he left the city and he knows what he wants in the suburbs. He is vigilant to see that the conditions that caused him to leave the city do not repeat themselves in his new home. He is therefore active in local government and social matters to protect his new home against what he regards as evil influences. He is prepared to make claims on the government and the school in a way which would never occur to the citizens of the village or town. His participation is apt to be vigorous and heated. He tells suburban officials what he wants for his neighbourhood and tells the teacher what he wants for his child. Suburban governments and schools must, therefore, be prepared to listen and work with citizens who are anxious about their rights and their futures. (p. 323)

However, participation as an equal member with educators on a school council is not consistent with the values of parents at Grandy's River Collegiate and will not appeal to the majority of them. As noted above, parents in the communities of Burnt Islands and Rose Blanche are not politically active in school affairs. They seldom make demands on the school or attempt to change their school. There will be little interest in school councils among the parents who were interviewed in the Grandy's River study. They see the principal and most teachers not only as professionals, but also as trusted and respected citizens. The parents interviewed in the case study would not see any need to become involved in the running of the school, and they will probably be uncomfortable with the mandate and agenda of such a council. They are, however, keenly interested in their own children's education and proud of their schools. There are ways to involve them, but school councils do not appear to be the most promising way.

There are similarities between rural schools and some inner city schools with large populations of immigrant, English-as-a-second-language students. For many of the students in both types of schools, the culture they have known is being rejected, and they are being asked to accept a way of life that is best characterized as middle-class and urban. For those for whom high academic achievement is an unattractive or unobtainable goal, a bleak economy is instilling a sense of hopelessness. They are being asked to choose between the culture and life they have and know, but which is unable to provide them with the means of making a living, and a culture and life that they do not know, which promises them jobs and security, but in some faraway town in some unfamiliar occupation. It is not an easy choice. One teacher at Grandy's River commented, "I hear it from students that, because they are so worried about the future and it looks so bleak, a lot of them take it the other way and give up ... What's the point of graduating anyway?" (Brown, 1994, p. 118).

Future Prospects

If the current reform plans are implemented, schools like Grandy's River Collegiate will disappear, consolidated with schools in larger centers, and students in small rural communities will be transported to schools outside the communities in which they live. The current educational reform legislation, regulations, and guidelines released by government reinforce the inevitability of such an occurrence.

Part of the problem lies in the government's adoption of a model that is favored by the middle-class, suburban cultural style. Nachtigal (1992), who has written extensively about rural education, is concerned about the bigger/more-is-better syndrome, which permeates the urban society and which is expressed by state education agencies. In his view, the adoption of the mass production factory model of schooling was prompted by the need to serve a rapidly growing urban industrial society and has led to a model that favors the urban school:

> In order to operate effectively and efficiently such a school needed large numbers. Without large numbers it is not economically feasible to have the number of specialized teachers needed to teach a comprehensive array of narrowly defined courses. School *quality* was, and to a large extent continues to be, equated with *quantity*, measured by the number of courses offered, the number of teachers with advanced degrees, and the number of books in the library. With this definition of quality, small rural schools could never be as good as larger urban schools. The logical solution to this "rural school problem" was to make schools bigger, more like urban schools. (p. 81)

What this has led to in the United States and in Canada is the consolidation of schools, an action that is continuing today in Newfoundland. What is needed for a more optimistic outlook for rural schools is a willingness on the part of government to admit

that their goals can be achieved in more than one best way. Ghosh and Ray (1995), in a discussion of equality of education, argue that at times it is necessary to provide unequal treatment in order to favor the least privileged, and that this applies to geographic location. They use the words of Husen (1979), who argues against the idea that "there is only one approved avenue to the 'mainstream of dignity,'" and asserts that "the problem of achieving real equality of opportunity is one of providing multiple options based on different values that are not ranked along only one dimension" (p. 89). It is to multiple options that we must turn in order to discover how rural schools such as Grandy's River Collegiate can capitalize on their rural advantages rather than be eliminated because of their perceived weaknesses.

MacDonald (1996), in an article in *The Globe and Mail*, reviews the bestselling book *The Digital Economy* by D. Tapscott. She quotes Tapscott as commenting that people used to believe learning and working were separate periods of their lives, but that has changed: "When you graduated you were set for life," says Tapscott. "In the new economy, you graduate and you're set for 15 minutes. Working and learning are fast becoming the same activity" (p. B1). When discussing the changes that will impact on society because of the information highway, Tapstock comments: "It's changing the way business is conducted, changing the nature of jobs, the nature of commerce. It will change how we learn, how we take care of ourselves and how we function as a democratic society as a whole" (p. B1).

It is this change in society that excites Nachtigal (1992) as he envisages the rural school responding to a "new story" and becoming part of the information society. Like Galbraith (1992) he believes that the very qualities that characterize the rural school will equip it to handle the demands of the information society, that "the rural school will be a major player in how rural communities adapt to the changes of the information society" (Nachtigal, 1992, p. 84). Nachtigal's belief is that rural schools can cope with the demands of the information society better than urban schools, because they are smaller and because of the close relationships that exist between school and community, teachers and students. Like Galbraith (1992), he believes that the future of the rural school lies in serving the whole community, adults as well as youth, as the school becomes the hub of learning in a broad sense. This view is shared by Newton and Newton (1992) who think that the rural school will become better connected with its community by developing the characteristics of a learning organization as defined by Senge (1990). Learning in the new, emerging information society is seen as lifelong, which presents a promising opportunity for the revitalization of rural education and the destruction of the bigger-is-better model.

Howley and Howley (1995) argue, however, that technology should not be seen as a panacea for the problems facing rural schools, that technology brings with it other problems, such as itself being seen as the one best system. They warn that technology cannot be viewed as merely "how to get the stuff," because "Rural schools are destined to lose that rat race. By the time they are 'up to speed' in technology, the benchmark will have moved" (p. 127). Used properly by rural schools, however, technology can help create a new type of school. Nachtigal (1992) envisages rural schools, using information technology effectively, becoming the center of community life. He argues that the closeness and interrelatedness can allow the school to connect with local needs and interests. Rural people, it is argued, have a strong attachment to the place, that the main rural virtue is "stewardship of the earth within particular rural locales" (Howley & Howley, 1995, p. 129). The rural school, with all its resources (including technology), can be rooted in the local community but transcend it and become the center of learning and culture for all ages. Information technology can link the school and its community with

the information highway, a global network of information and resources (Seal & Harmon, 1995).

Some rural schools already operate as community agencies for lifelong education. The OECD report (1994) provides a description of such a school:

> Schools are often planned as an integrated complex, providing a service not only to children but to the entire population. In Northern Sweden a new school complex is being built at Karesuando, in a very remote area. It is also designed to serve as a cultural centre, with a meeting hall for the use of nearby villages and a municipal library operating alongside the school library, a historical research centre and, during the holidays, a showroom for local arts and crafts. The idea here is that schools in rural areas should be at the very heart of cultural development and provide a foundation for social unity. (p. 18)

As the report reveals, this arrangement is not seen as unusual in Sweden, nor in Greece. In both countries school centers in rural areas provide a multitude of services, from day care to after-school programs, a municipal library, meeting rooms for parents, cultural events, adult education, and sports activities.

This concept of the school is supported by Hobbs (1992), who sees the need for the rural school to be part of rural development, working together with other providers of education and training, as well as with community groups, agencies, and organizations. Hobbs' view is that educational institutions are currently operating too much in isolation, and there is a lack of integration of individual and community goals. He observes, "Providing skill training for which there are no jobs, or no prospects for jobs, is of little benefit to anyone, least of all those who receive the training" (pp. 39-40). The school, Hobbs maintains, as "the most prominent community institution and the one that contributes most to community identity" (p. 40) is the logical location for community services and lifelong training and education.

Many of the pieces needed to create rural schools as centers of lifelong learning in an information society are already in place, but the evidence from the Grandy's River Collegiate study is that without government willingness to consider multiple options for the delivery of rural education, the pieces are not likely to be fitted together. If the provincial department of education adheres to the viability criteria they have proposed and maintains a belief in bigger-is-better, then there will be little opportunity for alternatives to be considered.

Currently, at Grandy's River Collegiate there is a computer link with the information highway, through a provincial education computer network Stem~Net. Committed teachers, administrators, and a school community are proud of their school and pleased with the personal as well as professional relationships that exist there. There is trust in a system and respect for those who work within it. At the same time, there is a need for community refocusing, as a proud fishing community must come to grips with new economic realities. The community has federal funding for retraining fishery workers, and adult education courses are offered in rented space during the evenings. As well, women in the community are known as talented craftswomen, with a great deal of interest in craft courses and techniques.

It does not take a great deal of imagination to envisage a new Grandy's River learning center, where people from the two communities currently served by the school could meet and learn from their earliest years until late in life. Instead of taking people out of the local community, such a center could build on the strengths of homogeneity and smallness. It could help the community learn not only about the outside world, but also to understand itself better. Whether this will happen will be determined by educational policymakers. The model they hold for rural education will ultimately determine what happens in rural areas. Will it be bigger-is-better and the continued consolidation

of rural schools in an attempt to make them more like urban schools? Or will a rural school be seen as a different kind of school, best designed to reflect the different needs of its small population, as a lifelong education center, the hub of learning in the community? It will all depend on the model. Policymakers would be wise to listen to Kenneth Boulding:

> We cannot walk before we toddle,
> But we may toddle much too long
> If we embrace a lovely Model
> that's consistent, clear and wrong. (Franklin, 1990, p. 32)

Note

1. Although written in 1971, Brembeck's categorization of cultural styles was similar to the categories in Grandy's River case study and was helpful in analyzing the conflicting values.

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It's All About Success! Learning and Living in a Small, Rural Alberta School

New Norway is a small rural school in a traditional farming community. Neither the educational backgrounds of the community members nor the national dropout figures would predict that most of the students would stay in school to complete grade 12, that over 50% would go on to postsecondary education, or that the school would graduate three Canada Scholars in five years. In this article I explore the strategies they used to encourage student success, show how the success of these strategies is embedded in the culture of the school, and portray the incremental development of such an ethos by means of specific decisions and daily modeling. It's a story about success!

La petite école à New Norway se trouve au coeur d'une communauté agricole traditionnelle. Ni la formation éducative des membres de la communauté, ni le taux national de décrochage auraient prédit que la plupart des élèves complèteraient leur douzième année, ou bien que plus de 50% d'entre eux poursuiveraient des études postesecondaires, ou encore que l'école produirait trois lauréats—Canada Scholars—en cinq ans. Dans cet article je sonde les stratégies utilisées pour encourager les élèves à réussir. Je démontre comment le succès de ces stratégies est imprégné dans la culture organisationnelle de l'école, et je trace le développement cumulatif qu'une telle philosophie occasionne dans les prises de décisions spécifiques et dans des situations exemplaires quotidiennes. C'est une véritable histoire de succès!

> Cathy Sylvester is pleased with her class's results. Four months ago, she would never have believed that could happen. They had seemed such a ragged group, only one or two real stars, one or two deadbeats, all the rest no better than middling.... She had always to keep on this class. Checking homework, marking labs, doing her walkabouts through the classroom, at their worst they were never bad, at their best never that good, her job never too onerous and never done. Nobody finished in the 90s; only four failed. Nobody left her classroom with a "bad experience"; nobody's life was transformed. Over the semester, they had learned a little science, a little human nature, grown four months older and moved one credit closer to graduating. It could have been a whole lot worse. (Dryden, 1995, p. 260)

This vignette in a popular bestseller documenting life in a large urban Canadian high school is redolent of the possibilities and frustrations of teaching adolescents. They are grouped in a class and yet they do not coalesce; there is little excitement about science, the subject matter of the class; they lack the urge to become engaged in learning so the teacher constantly has to encourage them to try to bring them back to the task at hand. In the end her strategies of monitoring and motivating seem to have paid off for there are public indicators of success: a reasonably behaved group who have learned a little more about working cooperatively, achieved passing grades, evinced some interest in science, and moved one credit closer to the graduating diploma. Yet although these are the usual markers of success in schools—grades, discipline, graduation—this teacher

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retains a sense of frustration that where so much was possible only a little has been achieved. She recognizes that the students too must have a sense of that gap, but she believes that without the will to learn, the drive to succeed, without the support of their parents, she can only take them so far. This is the most crucial question for many secondary school staffs: How can educators kindle in students a desire to learn and how can they help them be successful?

The literature on success in school tends to focus either on the context, the school organization and culture that the student enters, or on students and the specific characteristics of adolescents. The first is the literature from educational administration, which ranges in emphasis from laying out the characteristics of effective schools (Purkey & Smith, 1983) to examining school culture and the work of building community (Sergiovanni, 1995). The second is the literature on the psychology of adolescence, which includes an emphasis on student motivation (Anderman & Maehr, 1994) and a focus on at-risk students (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989).

Much of the literature reflects particular orientations to the purpose of education. Some, while emphasizing the school as the context for the student, gives only passing reference to the notion of the community where the student lives as being more than a background context for the school. Some literature that focuses on the student gives the school organization only a brief mention. But even this metaphor of subject and setting, of student and school, is limited because its stress is on two solitudes rather than on the relationships between them. As Dryden's (1995) vignette illustrated, it is not enough to have an appropriate setting; the students have to want to work together and to engage in learning. It is not enough for individual students to be willing to learn unless the circumstances of the school and the classroom support them in this endeavor. Similarly, it is insufficient for the school to hold open houses and parents' nights: the school and parents have to work together consistently to help ensure that students can be successful.

Lately a third literature that combines aspects of these three views of the student, the school, and the community and coalesces around the philosophies of middle schools has received attention. A middle-school philosophy advocates replacing equal classroom blocks on a regular timetable with the interdisciplinary organization of teachers and heterogeneous groups of students in flexible blocks of time. It stresses the use of active learning and cooperative effort rather than individual competition and provides a broader curriculum with more opportunities for student success. In addition, the middle-school approach sustains a school culture that reflects these values in shared decisionmaking, parental and community involvement, and continuous staff development (Bechtol & Sorenson, 1993; George & Shewey, 1994).

Varying in their emphases, such literatures are valuable when reflecting on the issues surrounding school success for students. In the remainder of this article I describe, then examine with reference to these literatures on successful schools, what one school did in its attempts to encourage students to learn and to help them succeed. The research data were gathered over the course of the 1993-1994 school year as part of the Exemplary Schools Project (Haughey, Fenwick, Larson, Noonan, & Rochon, 1995).

New Norway School

This small, grades 1-12 school with approximately 350 students, including 106 in grades 10-12, is situated in the small rural farming community of New Norway about 100 km. southeast of Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, and about 20 km. from Camrose, a retirement community of 13,000 people. The case stories that relate some of the activities and routines in the school over the course of a day are interspersed with commentary.

Sustaining Relationships

> It is 8 a.m. in New Norway and the hazy February sun is struggling over the horizon. The staff parking lot is already full of cars and most of the 20 teachers are in the staff room. They are seated on the sofas and around the big worktable, or they stand by the mailbox or lean on the counter that holds the coffee urn. There is lots of chatter; some people are complaining of the poor showing of the Edmonton hockey team while others are discussing the upcoming ski trip for senior students. There is a momentary pause as someone asks whether anyone has heard anything about Jared's mother and another person responds with information that she is getting out of hospital soon. From observation alone it would be impossible to name the last speaker as one of the local pastors, or to identify the school secretary, the library aide, the elementary teachers, the resource room aides, the senior high staff, or the parent volunteers, but they are all there. So is the principal; he is the one in the white shirt.
>
> There is laughter and camaraderie but also the bustle of people trying to sort papers or do last minute tasks. Jokes and comments swing from small groups to involving everyone and then back again. At 8:15, the 10 yellow buses begin to line up outside the school, and within five minutes the room is almost empty.

As in many schools, the half hour before students arrive at the school is an important social time for staff. Some of the teachers live close to the school, some live in other farming communities, and some live in Camrose. A couple of the teachers have spent their entire careers at the school, but most have come in the last eight years. Many have taught together in one or other of the jurisdiction's nine schools, and of the 20 teachers on staff this year six are new to the school and three to teaching. As teachers and community members congregate in the staff room, there are conversations about local events as well as discussions about instructional issues. People are comfortable with one another and willing to share ideas, resources, to exchange classrooms or to help out with coaching. It is part of the reason they like to teach at the school. People care about each other and no one hoards resources, time, or expertise.

Parents and community members are welcome in the staff room at any time. Three local pastors drop into the school regularly. For them it is a good opportunity to share information about common concerns. The atmosphere of sharing and caring evident in the staff room is carried throughout the school, modeled by teachers and parent volunteers, and students quickly absorb the expectation that in a community everyone is expected to cooperate.

Deal and Peterson (1990) described the enduring sense of culture that this early morning vignette reflects as

> That intangible "feel" of a school, the unspoken understanding of how things are done around here. You can sense it as you approach the building. You can almost smell and taste it as you walk through the doors. You can see it in the pictures on the walls or hear it in the chatter in the halls. School culture reflects the values, beliefs and traditions of the school community, which underlie the relations among students, parents, teachers and principal. (p. 3)

The picture in the first vignette is so similar to that in many schools that it would be easy to take it at face value and not recognize that such communities have to be actively sustained through the goodwill of the participants. Those familiar with rural communities might be surprised that there is no lingering effect of the difficult strike called by the teachers' association over salary negotiations that closed the school for a couple of months the previous spring. Although the community was divided in its support of the strike and concerned about its impact on students, parents were pleased that the

school made deliberate plans to ensure that students were not penalized by the lost time and it quickly became a nonissue. Teachers focused on essential learning and structured assignments that helped students to reestablish patterns for learning.

This small community supports four denominations; the three Protestant pastors have churches in New Norway, whereas the Catholic families attend a church in Camrose. The close links among the pastors and the school mirrors the interest parents have in issues that directly affect their religious beliefs. There is an expectation in the community that students will work hard and play fair and that their religious beliefs will be considered in curriculum decisions. The school has to take these interests into account in planning such traditional events as Hallowe'en and Christmas, but most often the willingness of the school staff to provide alternatives has been more than sufficient in allaying parents' concerns.

Although the school includes students from various Christian faiths, it does not have the same diversity on ethnic grounds. The community name reflects the original European background of many of the students, and in 1993-1994 only two nonwhite students, both of whom come from outside the school boundary, attended the school. Almost everyone speaks English as their first language.

Neither is there a wide diversity in employment incomes. New Norway (pop. 273) is a small service center for the surrounding farms and acreages. Most people are employed either in farming or in service, construction, or transportation industries in Camrose. Although the Statistics Canada unemployment rate for this area in 1992-1993 was only 3% (Haughey et al., 1995), most people reported employment incomes of less than $30,000. Half of the population have completed high school and 30% have some postsecondary education. These figures are similar for men and women.

The importance of the culture of a school and its congruence with the values of the community is well recognized. Ramsey and Clark (1990) in their study of an Australian school concluded that the congruence between the values held in the community and those promoted in the school strengthened the culture of the school and was "one of the most powerful influences for effective school improvement" (p. 179). This network of relationships among parents, community members, and teachers helped reinforce for students their shared values about the importance and place of education. This situation is most common in mainstream settings where the values of the home resemble the expectations of the school. For Ramsey and Clark it was not enough to expect that parents and the local community would support the values promoted by the school—the school had to work actively with community members to become cognizant of their values and to identify how school and home could work together to reinforce their common purpose. Sergiovanni (1995) similarly stresses the point that "good schools ... do not expect families and students to bear all of the burdens of alignment with the values of the school. Instead, they work hard to align themselves with the values of the home. They are committed to respond with empathy and to respect those values" (p. 148).

Welcoming Students and Staff

> The custodian, broom in hand, is near the front door welcoming students and as bootless they race or dawdle to their lockers outside the classrooms the teachers are already there greeting them by name, asking about family members, commenting on last night's local curling match, teasing them about the poor showing of their hockey hero, listening to stories of new skates or hearing about the TV movie. The conversations sound like those you would overhear among friends or family members in the local store or on the street. Everyone is in the halls, then the buzzer rings, the halls empty, the national anthem is played and suddenly there is the quiet buzz of 347 students beginning their morning's work.

> The principal comes down one of the hallways. He was talking with a group of students from an early morning basketball practice just before the buzzer sounded. He heads for the staff room, changes into boots and outdoor coat and grabs a broom from the entry-way as he goes out the front door. There was a fresh dump of snow this morning and he knows the bus drivers will have begun to sweep out the buses. He joins them for a few minutes, swapping jokes and local news. If they have concerns about any of the students, he knows they will mention it but in the meantime the conversations are about the upcoming curling bonspiel.

In this school welcoming and being welcomed are important activities in which all staff participate. They help set the tone, and through these daily conversations teachers share in what is happening in students' lives and what is important to them. New Norway School draws its students from the surrounding farms and acreages. Within the school boundary, no one has to travel more than a half hour to get to the school, but the lack of part-time employment combined with their own farm chores and responsibilities after school means that for many of these students school is the weekday social center. Hence the time in the halls is important for students too.

The principal's willingness to participate in tasks such as sweeping out a bus or clearing the skating rink before school are highly valued by the community. They may not have students at the school, but they recognize his work ethic and believe that it is a good model for the students.

As in any culture, a number of rituals are important in reinforcing the values of the culture. In New Norway four events are related to welcoming. One event for many students and parents is the first time they visit the school, and they recalled with clarity the way they had been welcomed. Another is the individual welcome given parents at the school Open House when the principal personally serves coffee to anyone who wants it. Two daily welcoming rituals are the morning gathering in the staff room and the greeting of students. These provide an informal, supportive beginning to the day. The tone set by these cultural practices and the unfolding of the day in the routines defined by staff and students are two examples of how culture is both enacted and envisioned. Every text on school leadership and effective schools stresses the importance of school culture (Sergiovanni, 1995), but it is in such small everyday occurrences that the values and beliefs are made manifest and kept alive. Despite the rhetoric, a school's culture depends on everyone's commitment for its continued existence.

Providing Individual Support

> Back in the school, the principal heads down the hallway to the library. Through the open doorways he can see what is happening in every classroom. The principal sticks his head in a classroom, greets the students and teacher and then speaks quietly to one boy. The student will come and see him in second period. Already the principal is following up on a request heard earlier in the staff room. Jason is having difficulty coping with his assignments and the teacher asked the principal to help him reinforce with Jason the importance of taking responsibility for his efforts. The principal will also ask Jason what assignments he is having difficulty with and together they will plan how Jason will approach the work that is to be done. Teaching organizational and study skills will help Jason to take charge of his own success.
>
> This form of counseling fills a large part of the vice-principal's day also. He, too, is often seen in the hallways talking to individual students, asking about their progress, helping them reassess what they have done, and ensuring that they are achieving success. Quiet and with a wonderful sense of humor, he is an immediate contrast to the energetic and fast-talking principal. They both want all

students to realize that they have no reason to fail. Sustained effort will bring success.

Students value these one-on-one sessions, because the administrators seem to know how they are feeling and give them this time as a chance to recover their poise. Some who just need to hear again that they are valued spend the interlude in general discussion, while others are coached in specific strategies from handling anger to study skills. The concrete instructions provide both a support for their present difficulty and a framework that can be used in the future. Throughout the discussions the importance of effort as a way of affirming one's value is stressed.

Wehlage et al. (1989) consider this informal counseling to be one aspect of the development of school membership for at-risk students. For them it is an essential step in the reciprocal arrangement between feeling cared about and welcomed and wanting to participate in school activities and conform to school norms. Three New Norway students described their experiences:

> I just really like the way the teachers are always happy together and they're always having fun together, and it gives you a feeling that we're all part of something here.... The teachers all call you by name. They know you and they know what you're involved in. I think that helps. It makes you feel important. Instead of a big school where you're just kind of a number, here you're a somebody.
>
> Here you get into trouble for something and five minutes later you can go back in, and you can talk about it with the teachers. They don't hold a grudge against you.
>
> Here they congratulate you, give you a pat on the back, "Good job! Well done! Here lots of people know and feel good about it.

New Norway students reiterated the comments of the students in Wehlage et al.'s study who considered their present school to be

> a friendlier and more caring place than their previous schools had been. They talked about peers accepting them and teachers caring about them. They volunteered their observations about the importance of adults displaying a willingness to help them overcome academic and personal problems, and the value of being accepted as an individual. (p. 114)

At New Norway this combination of affirming, supporting, modeling, and advising is not confined only to those who teach the students. Everyone has a good word for the student. As Wehlage et al. conclude,

> At-risk students need schools that deliberately act in ways to show their commitment to helping them overcome the impediments to school membership. This active commitment begins with an assumption of reciprocity between adults and students and requires warm personal relations between them. (p. 133)

Developing Independent Study Skills

> On his way down the hall the principal passes a chart with a grid of boxes, some of which are colored in. He stops for a quick look. It is the distance education chart, and every student on a distance education course has a line of boxes. Each box contains the due date of an assignment, and when the work is handed in the box is colored. He can see at a glance who has work outstanding and how far behind the student is. When he bumps into any recalcitrant students during the course of the day, he will remind them of their responsibilities. Students know that if they do not keep up, they will stay in the library at lunch time and

complete the work under his supervision. He is proud of the school's completion rate of 98%, but student effort is also important. If a student has a poor mark in a sequence of good grades on distance education assignments, the principal will be alerted and the student may be asked to redo the assignment. The expectation is that students will complete the work on time and to the best of their ability.

Because the school has only 106 students in the senior grades, the staff are unable to provide a wide range of optional courses, and so many students will take one or two distance education courses in order to obtain enough credits to graduate. The course materials, which follow the Alberta curriculum, are developed by the Alberta Distance Learning Center. Most courses include a variety of media. The student meets with the aide, who coordinates the distance education activities and identifies a time frame for completion of the course, including due dates for all assignments. It is these dates that are transferred to the distance education hall chart. Marking the materials is shared among staff at this and other secondary schools in the district. The aide faxes the materials to the appropriate teacher and notes the marks before returning the assignments to the students. Teachers frequently add comments and, besides telephoning the distance education teacher, students will usually consult another teacher in the school if they are having difficulties.

The principal closely monitors the process because it requires the student to be motivated and organized in order to keep to the schedule. Such skills, he tells seniors, will help them to develop independence and responsibility. Yet his monitoring is not just about completion. He wants to ensure that students will be successful, so students who start to fall behind meet with him and either develop a more realistic schedule or complete the outstanding work during their time at school. If they need assistance, there is usually a teacher who can help, and this is arranged. For the principal this is another way of learning, and it should be supported in order to ensure that students can succeed.

Distance education has been an option for students in many provinces since the 1930s. In Alberta the provision of distance learning, as distinct from the development of the learning resources, was transferred to school jurisdictions in 1989. Distance education through the provincial correspondence school had provided courses to students, but completion rates were on average about 30%. As pilot studies with completion rates of 90% confirmed (Haughey, 1990), it was essential to move the provision of distance learning closer to schools so that students could obtain appropriate and timely support and assistance. Although this was the major initiative, Alberta Education also hoped that it would be a starting point for the integration of technology in learning opportunities for students.

Since 1989 school jurisdictions, often working cooperatively, have provided the support and marking functions that are essential for success in distance education. In terms of teacher work load in this jurisdiction, distance education is considered either as a teaching course equivalent or as an extracurricular activity. Responsibilities for distance teaching in the various courses are divided among the principals at one of their first meetings of the school year. Many teachers are marking the work of fewer than 10 students, so providing written support and telephone coaching is not considered onerous. Courses using real-time components through audioconferencing have been less successful in this school; the lunch period, which was the only unscheduled time available in all the jurisdiction's schools, was highly prized by New Norway students as a time for activities other than distance education work.

This school has adopted alternatives that mitigate the impact of its small size, and it stresses those options that are reinforced by a small school population. Lee, Bryk, and Smith (1993) pointed out that small school size discourages undue discipline specialization, promotes staff cohesion, and engages teachers at the level of tacit belief rather than that of compliance. At New Norway School the frequency of communication; the open-

ness and sharing of resources, expertise, and time; and the staff's willingness to manage as a group are all promoted by the small school size.

Meeting Community Expectations

> As the principal returns to the office, the school secretary signals that he has a phone call from a parent. He deals with the call directly and promises to get back to the parent before the end of the day. Then he goes into the vice-principal's office next door and they discuss the parent's concern. A quick trip down the hall, a word with the teacher, and the principal is on the phone again. The concern is resolved. "If you have a concern, phone or come and talk to me," the principal tells the parents, and they do. "I'll get back to you within the day," he promises, and he does.

This small community is proud of its school and the principal knows that parents want their children to complete high school. Many tell him that although they did not attend school until graduation and were able to make a good living, they do not see the same opportunities for their children. Education will be key to their children's future, they believe. Their children also believe that graduating from high school is important, and they have chosen a wide range of postsecondary careers. In the year of the study all students completed their grade 12. About 50% of New Norway students enroll in postsecondary education, most moving to a local college and some going on to university.

The principal has been an administrator at this school for eight years. He followed a principal who had lost the confidence of some members of the community, because they felt that he did not display sufficient regard for students or their learning. Partly to ensure that parents and community members would get a clear and consistent answer to their questions, the present principal began the practice of answering personally all phone calls made to the school by members of the community. Now the practice is routine, and parents expect to be able to talk to one of the administrators when they call.

Parents have many opportunities to participate in the school, but most are working on or off the farm and they expect that when they have a concern, they can call and get an answer as in any other service center. The principal reinforces this expectation when he talks to parents. Many will know teachers and speak directly to them when they meet on the street or on weekends, but all phone calls are routed through the principal. Because these calls are seldom more than miscommunications about school events, the principal is often able to deal with them without involving the teacher. At the same time, parents know that they are welcome to come to the school and sit in on any of their children's classes. The principal does not wait until people have a concern to invite them to the school. He teaches the grade 12 accounting course and begins with the Income Tax section that deals with small businesses. He schedules the class for first thing in the morning and encourages parents to come to school and sit in the class. In the fall semester about 11 parents and community members did so.

Although the literature on effective school management refers to the principal's monopoly of the phone calls as "buffering the technical core" (Lee et al., 1993, p. 207), this was not the impetus for this principal's actions. He adopted for himself an entrepreneurial orientation that made sense to his community, that of the service center manager. He was there to make sure that their questions were heard, that their concerns were dealt with, that their recommendations for improvements were obtained, and that they had access to any complementary services that the center could provide.

The school did not have a formal parent group, although there had been attempts to start one. The initial group of parents found that they had little to contribute because they were happy with the school, and the group soon fizzled out. The elementary parents had formed a group to raise money for the building of playground equipment,

but once the task was completed they did not see the necessity of further meetings. Because parent councils have now been mandated by provincial legislation, the principal has worked with community members to form another group. In order to encourage continuing involvement, he finds that he needs to help develop discussion topics on which he is seeking advice.

From extensive research with schools, Epstein (1995) developed a model of the overlapping spheres of influence of school, family, and community. For her the student is the essential link between home and school. In this partnership, helping the student to be a successful learner is the focus of home, school, and community efforts. In partnerships the school becomes more familylike, recognizing "the child's individuality and making each child feel special and included" (p. 702), and the home becomes more school-like in its stress on "the importance of school, homework, and activities that build student skills and feelings of success" (p. 702). Meanwhile, communities create "family-like services and events to enable families to better support their children" (p. 702). Epstein goes on to describe various strategies for the development of successful partnerships (including parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community) that she found to be important in developing school-community-home partnerships in the Goals 2000 schools project.

At New Norway School the relationships between families and the school are celebrated through the sports, band, and drama activities, as well as at the formal yearly graduation ceremony. However, discussion about assisting students at home was more often individually fashioned. The student and parent(s) meet with the teacher or an administrator and concerns about good study practices are worked out. Although they are willing to help with specific school activities, parents have not been interested in volunteering in general. They receive a weekly newsletter, but rejected a yearly handbook as unnecessary and a waste of money because they could phone the school if they needed information. For them the promise of immediate contact and a speedy response has been more important than regularly scheduled meetings. There are many local community events for families from winter carnivals and bonspiels, to the annual New Norway Heritage Day, and county competitions involving the 4H clubs, and the Camrose Agricultural Show. Together these events provide opportunities for students to be successful and for the school to celebrate their achievements.

From a review of recent research literature, Lee et al. (1993) concluded that "Even in high school, parents' beliefs, goals, and values concerning education and achievement strongly influence adolescents, who tend to incorporate these standards into their own" (p. 190). Parents' attitudes are certainly important, but the pace of everyday life has affected their potential impact. For example, Dryden (1995), who spent most of the 1993-1994 year in an Ontario high school attending classes and talking to students and teachers, noted how little contact the parents and students had in their daily lives and how, in the process, the important message that parents cared about what their child was doing was often lost. He described attending a district presentation for school administrators on increasing parent involvement that for him was only a minor way of expressing interest in a child's welfare. "The far greater challenge," he concluded, "lies in the school helping parents to become more involved in parenting at home. As it is for kids, the problem for parents is skips and lates and homework undone. The answer is putting in those few extra minutes a night" (p. 222). These concerns are not confined to urban parents; in a rural setting where children balance chores, schoolwork, and extracurricular activities and adults balance farming with other employment in town, these issues are just as relevant.

Supporting Student Effort

> As the principal passes a classroom he notices a student who is sitting at the back working on an assignment during his spare period. He knows that the student is probably trying to upgrade his work to meet the 50% requirement. Students who do not get a passing grade on a unit are required to do sufficient supplementary work to earn a passing grade. And no one wants to have to spend their lunch-times on make-up work.
>
> In the next room, the teacher is working with a small group. These students have accelerated their learning and are working at the next grade level. The remainder of the class works quietly in other groups. He notices one of the students and is pleased to see her focused on her work. A student who was designated as "behind her grade level" when she came a year earlier, the student is now achieving well in a regular classroom. When they discussed her progress earlier in the term, she told him that much of it was due to the attitude of her teachers who were willing to explain the point yet one more time just for her and never made her feel as if she were stupid for not understanding.
>
> Passing another classroom, he notices a student who has only lately begun to be successful in his studies. He heard that the student had received a 53% on a recent test. Today he sticks his head in the door, "Excuse me, Mr. Thomas, " he apologizes, "but, Bill, I heard about your test score. Way to go, Bill!" he exclaims complete with a high five salute to the surprised student. "Yeah!" the class waves a response. Success is noticed and celebrated.

The school has developed a number of activities that are designed to ensure that students understand the importance of learning and that they have frequent opportunities for success. The 50% requirement was devised to prevent students falling so far behind that they felt they had no option but failure. Unit scores are posted, and students who do not pass are required to do further work in their own time and obtain a passing grade. The requirement ensures that students recognize the importance of regular effort.

The school has a number of students in the Integrated Occupational Program, a program designed for students who are functioning below grade level in their academic subjects. Some of these are students who have ability but have never discovered the excitement of learning. Others come from difficult home situations, and their personal problems overshadow their sense of worth and hence of achievement. Still others have poor social skills and learning strategies and have been marginalized in their previous schools.

The strategies that teachers initially developed to help these students achieve success are now used with all students. Being willing to respond to a student by explaining something as many times as it takes for the student to grasp the idea is one of those strategies. For the student in the above vignette, the sense of acceptance by teachers and peers was a major factor in the development of her self-confidence. The success, not only of the "best" students, but of all those who have achieved with effort, is valued and celebrated. New Norway students who volunteered that they were doing well were asked what *well* meant. Students responded that they had improved on their previous work. Their responses were based on individual marks, not competitive scores. It was effort that was valued most.

From a review of literature on factors affecting student motivation, Anderman and Maehr (1994) concluded that school context and especially the particular goals espoused by the staff have a great effect on student academic achievement:

> Thus, in spite of what an individual teacher might do to stress the value of learning for its own sake, to stress the role of effort and progress, to include all

> within the learning community, these efforts may be undermined if the school as a whole emphasizes grades, competition, and rewards. (p. 297)

The emphasis on successful effort rather than on grades is reflected in the official mission of the school, "that all students should be allowed every opportunity to reach their mastery level in academic studies while developing positive affirmation for their achievement" (Haughey et al., 1995, p. 85), but it is through the everyday actions of staff, students, and parents that these aspirations are realized. Students help each other, for group work is common, and they cheer each other on, as the vignette illustrates.

Expanding Opportunities for Success

> As lunch time nears, the principal checks the schedule for the gym. There are general athletic activities for the students, as well as practices for the school band, the "Reach for the Top" team, the Spring Concert participants, and possibly rehearsals for the school play. Over the lunch break, he returns to the staff room. Most teachers have some extracurricular responsibilities and are busy for at least some of the lunch period. The staff room door is open.

New Norway staff have deliberately sought out a variety of activities to engage students and provide them with opportunities for fun and success. The staff built a sand court for beach volleyball with the help of the local community, and archery is taught in the curling rink during the late spring. Most are group activities where cooperation and leadership are stressed, and many extend into the community through games and shows that provide another way of linking students and community members.

As befits a school with a longstanding tradition, New Norway has a strong sports program in which anyone can become involved. The music program also has a long history and draws former parents and general community members to the Spring Concert. The school play is staged as dinner theater in local community halls, with the staff providing the dinner. Like the graduation exercises, these activities provide opportunities for the community to come together and celebrate the skills of their students.

Providing Instructional Support

> When afternoon school has begun, the principal again walks through the school. He wants to sit in on a class of a newly assigned teacher. He is not sure that the teacher understands what it means to be committed to students: His teaching is not quite focused and his contact with students unsure and inconsistent.

School cultures are defined through the work of the members; the nurturing and sustaining of the value of commitment to students, through its clear expression in teaching, is part of everyone's responsibilities. The principal believes that monitoring teaching to ensure that students have appropriate opportunities for learning and assisting teachers to enhance their practice is part of his work. He wants everyone in the school, staff and students, to achieve success.

In this school there are many opportunities for teachers to see each other at work. The classroom doors remain open during class, making it easy for people to enter or leave without disturbing the entire group. During the day teachers as well as students move between classrooms, so they often teach in rooms decorated with student work done for a colleague. In some small schools where a teacher is the sole specialist in that content area, there is no one with whom the teacher can discuss specific content issues. In this school the teaching of individual subjects is shared among a number of teachers and the sharing of resource materials and exchanging of classes and units are encouraged. These recurrent patterns of interaction shape how teachers view their own work. As Hawley, Rosenholtz, Goodstein, and Hasselbring (1984) pointed out,

> Norms of collegiality don't develop by chance. They do not spring spontaneously out of teachers' mutual respect and concern for each other. Rather they are carefully engineered by structuring the work place with frequent exposure to contact and frequent opportunities for interaction. (p. 57)

In this school some parents held rather traditional views about the curriculum, and changes had to be introduced with care. The administrators kept the staff aware of proposed changes in provincial curricula, and teachers began early to change the school courses. In this way, when the program was finally mandated they were familiar with the changes and had already adapted the old courses to provide a smooth transition to the new requirements.

Both administrators teach and are recognized as excellent teachers. The principal, for example, teaches a grade 12 mathematics class that includes some grade 11 students who have had their course work accelerated, as well as students who are taking mathematics independently because they cannot fit the scheduled classes into their timetable. These students may be taking any one of the nine mathematics options available in the senior grades. This pattern may be found in other subject areas also. It militates against whole-class teaching as the sole means of instruction, and it encourages students to learn to focus on their own work when the teacher is busy with others. Its disadvantage is that there is little development of specific content objectives beyond the level prescribed in the Program of Studies, and there is little time for the development of alternative units. Teachers have to make judicious choices about "covering" the curriculum in each subject.

Offering Second Options

> In the afternoon, a former student who wants to complete his grade 12 diploma requirements comes to the school. He tells the principal that he wants to register at this school and is prepared to come every day. Together they plan a program that will allow him to challenge courses and, with steady work, graduate with his peers. The student is grateful. They walk down the hall to a classroom, the principal introduces the student to a teacher and explains the situation. The teacher will take it from there, but the principal will touch base with the student frequently to ensure that he is able to do the work and that he is fulfilling his obligations to the teacher.

In describing another similar situation, the principal concluded that it was not the student's job to fit into the school, but the task of the school to fit the student's needs. On another occasion, in response to a question about dropouts, one of the teachers explained that from the staff's perspective the students did not drop out. They took time out, but they would be back, he assured me. He then went on to describe why only 12 of approximately 150 grade 12 students had not completed in the past five years. In a number of these 12 cases the families had moved away during the student's senior year.

If a student wanted to return, the school would do its best to accommodate the request. Frequently this involved not only setting out a schedule for the student, but also holding regular meetings between the student and one of the administrators or teachers with whom the student was comfortable. In this way concerns or problems could be handled quickly and in a low-key fashion. This was the focus of the meeting that the principal had with Jason earlier in the day. It was also evident that these students were supported by all the teachers, who would ask how they were doing and give them positive comments whenever they met them. The combination of personal support and general interest was empowering. In describing what she had discovered about engaging adolescents in learning, Dodd (1995) emphasized that "to become engaged, students must have some feelings of *ownership*—of the class or the task—and *personal power*—a

belief that what they do will make a difference" (p. 65, italics in original). This was also the belief among New Norway teachers.

Partly because of the small number of senior high school students, New Norway School seemed already to function in the cluster format that has been adopted by larger secondary schools, especially in the United States. A cluster is a small unit where a group of three or four teachers is responsible for approximately 80 students over three or four years. However, Newberg (1995) warned that clusters may be no more than another organizational fad unless there is "an ethic of caring that pays close attention to students' development over extended periods of time" (p. 713). This ethic of caring is what binds people to each other and to the school. It is one of the attributes of a learning community as identified by Sergiovanni (1995). The teachers at New Norway thought that although providing a caring and enjoyable atmosphere was important, it was insufficient for student success. They believed that success was due to helping students meet their goals.

Keeping in Touch

> The buzzer goes. As students get ready for home, the teachers and administrators are again in the halls, checking clothing, praising work, admiring efforts, joking and laughing with students. The principal joins two teachers as they head for the gym for basketball practice. He speaks briefly to some of the senior students congregated by the exit door, as they pull on boots or runners. He is discussing the donation of the proceeds of the school store. He will be back later when the practice is almost over. He knows that there will be a couple of community people in the gym then and he will get a chance to speak to them. Its another way of keeping in touch.

This school is sustained by talk. There is a minimum of paperwork; instead most items are communicated orally and decisions are made by consensus. There is little talk of rules or discipline; instead the principal jokes that there is a no-rules rule. By this he means that instead of a list of requirements and punishments, he uses only one maxim: that people treat each other with respect. Asked about rules, students immediately respond with the no-rules rule. They add items such as not wearing hats in class or using inappropriate language or leaving the school at lunch time without parental permission, but for all of these they return to the notion of respect for peers, for teachers, for parents.

Like most schools, New Norway sells magazine subscriptions and raffle tickets to help purchase books for the library or additional materials for the resource room. The school also runs a store. The banner above its counter proclaims, "We serve winners here!" Each year the senior students donate the proceeds of the store to a community cause. The previous year it went toward the purchase of a trampoline for a disabled student from New Norway. In this way the students learn to give back to the community.

At the time of the study the school staff were aware that the province proposed to merge school jurisdictions and reduce their number from 141 to 60. There was general support in the community for the Conservative government's rationale of balancing the budget and reducing the provincial debt. Teachers knew this meant that they would be asked to take a 5% cut in salary and that education budgets in general would be cut. The sense of uncertainty that this news engendered varied, but staff were aware that one change was likely to bring others. They wondered if an amalgamation of jurisdictions would mean that New Norway School might be closed. Or would the school become a grades 1-9 school? Would those staff on temporary contracts find themselves unemployed? This was the uncertainty that the principal had foreseen at the beginning of the year.

At the first staff meeting he produced a page with a large dot on it. Asked what they saw, the staff described the dot. The principal went on to point out that there was much more space than dot and in the coming year he recommended that they should concentrate on the space. This sense of focusing on what can be accomplished was clearly evident in the culture of the school.

Lessons Learned

"What is essential is invisible to the eye," was the fox's secret in de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (1943). What is important to the understanding of this rural school was also below the surface. The literature on effective schooling is replete with lists of attributes of effective schools, and although there is some recognition that these items are not appropriate for every school, there is less emphasis on the complexity and consistency required for their enactment as part of school life.

In New Norway a number of observable strategies that formed part of the everyday reality of the school seemed to focus on ensuring student success. One was the overall culture of the school itself and the strong sense of being a cohesive, caring group of people. Other strategies included the way in which students and community members were welcomed to the school by staff; the development of students' independent study skills; the provision of accelerated programs; and the development of a wide range of options for noon and after-school activities. Equally crucial was the provision of individual support for students through a repertoire of strategies from the 50% requirement, to the use of individual, just-in-time counseling, the nurturing of positive attitudes toward learning through student acceptance, the celebration of even small successes, and the use of challenge exams and flexible scheduling to allow students to fit in. As well, support was provided for teachers, and keeping in touch with community interests and parental concerns was important.

Less obvious is how all this was sustained through the teachers' concern for students and their willingness to make student success their personal responsibility. There were many examples from the teachers' work lives of their consistent commitment to this goal.

New Norway has retained many of the traditional values associated with an agrarian economy—a strong sense of individualism combined with an equal recognition of the importance of working together. These are the values that have been supported and sustained by staff in the school. But the teachers have also stressed the link between purpose and student engagement and have placed emphasis on task mastery rather than competitive ability. According to Anderman and Maehr (1994), students who are given task-focused goals have more positive attitudes toward school and higher self-concepts of their ability. However, they also warned that for such initiatives to be successful, the whole school must be involved. What is absent from the vignette that opens this article is any sense that this teacher's goals were part of a schoolwide focus. What New Norway School has demonstrated is that when parents, teachers, and students work together, everyone can be successful.

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L'école minoritaire de langue française et son rôle dans la communauté

L'école, de concert avec la famille et l'Église, a toujours contribué à la reproduction de la langue et de la culture françaises en milieu minoritaire canadien. Cependant, depuis la fin des années soixante, l'Église et la famille sont moins en mesure d'assurer cette reproduction. Par conséquent, c'est donc plus que jamais à l'école que revient cette tâche. Mais avec une clientèle scolaire qui présente une grande diversité sur les plans linguistique et social, l'école fait face à un grand défi. Cet article porte sur une école secondaire qui a relevé ce défi en établissant, entre autres, de solides partenariats avec la communauté. L'analyse tente de montrer comment de tels partenariats, même s'ils ne réussissent pas à éliminer toutes les tensions, peuvent contribuer à la reproduction sociale et culturelle du groupe minoritaire.

The school, together with the family and the church, has always contributed to linguistic and cultural reproduction in Canadian minority francophone settings. However, since the end of the 1960s, the church and the family are less able to effect this reproduction. Consequently, it is more than ever the school that carries out this task. With a linguistically and culturally diverse student clientele, this is a considerable challenge for the school. This article describes a secondary school that has taken up the challenge, establishing, among other things, solid partnerships with the community. The analysis attempts to show how such partnerships, although they do not manage to eliminate all tensions, can contribute to the social and cultural reproduction of the minority group.

Introduction[1]

L'école, de concert avec la famille et l'Église, a toujours joué un rôle de premier plan en milieu francophone minoritaire canadien. C'est par le biais de ces trois institutions que la langue et la culture françaises se sont transmises d'une génération à l'autre. On remarque cependant que, depuis la fin des années soixante, l'Église a perdu de son influence et qu'à titre d'agent de reproduction sociale, linguistique et culturelle, son rôle a passablement diminué, surtout en milieu urbain. On constate également que de son côté la famille francophone qui vit en milieu minoritaire a connu, depuis vingt-cinq ans, des transformations majeures. Les familles exclusivement francophones se font de moins en moins nombreuses. Ce phénomène s'explique, d'une part, par l'augmentation des mariages mixtes où l'un des partenaires ne parle pas le français et, d'autre part, par le fait que de plus en plus de familles francophones s'anglicisent. Par conséquent, c'est donc plus que jamais à l'école que revient la tâche de reproduire la langue et la culture françaises.

Mais la présence d'une clientèle scolaire de plus en plus hétérogène sur les plans linguistique et culturel, rend le rôle de reproduction qui incombe à l'école minoritaire de langue française plus difficile à accomplir que dans le passé, lorsque les élèves venaient de familles dont la langue d'usage était, dans la majorité des cas, le français. La communauté est maintenant plus diversifiée sur les plans linguistique, social et culturel. Aujourd'hui, la communauté d'intérêt n'est plus celle du village ou de la petite localité où

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la vie quotidienne se déroule en français, mais c'est plutôt une communauté hétérogène où l'influence du groupe majoritaire anglophone est omniprésente.

Comment, dans ces conditions, l'école située en milieu minoritaire peut-elle alors, comme dans le passé, assurer son rôle de reproduction sociale, linguistique et culturelle et contribuer de ce fait au maintien de la langue et de la culture françaises? Comment rallier une communauté dont les membres ne partagent pas tous les mêmes intérêts et la même vision en ce qui a trait au rôle de l'école minoritaire de langue française? Comment l'école peut-elle arriver à composer avec les tensions propres à ce milieu?

C'est donc sur le rôle de reproduction de l'école, sur la relation entre l'école et la communauté et sur les tensions qui s'y rattachent que portera la réflexion qui suit. À titre d'illustration, je présenterai le cas d'une école secondaire de langue française, située dans le sud-ouest ontarien, *l'École secondaire de Pain Court (ESPC)*, qui a su, grâce à un plan de développement stratégique bien orchestré, créer des partenariats importants dans sa communauté. Cela a d'ailleurs eu pour effet de raviver la présence francophone dans l'une des régions de l'Ontario les plus assimilées au groupe anglophone dominant, en la rendant plus visible dans la communauté environnante. Les données recueillies semblent indiquer que la création de partenariats solides entre l'école et la communauté contribuent à l'établissement d'un terrain plus propice à la reproduction sociale, linguistique et culturelle du groupe minoritaire, ce qui ne signifie pas pour autant l'absence de tensions et de multiples contradictions au sein même de l'école, comme nous le verrons d'ailleurs dans les pages qui suivent.

Éducation minoritaire de langue française

Historiquement, l'école minoritaire de langue française a joué un rôle de premier plan dans le maintien et le renforcement de l'identité collective, en favorisant la reproduction de la langue et de la culture françaises (Gérin-Lajoie, 1995; Heller, 1994; Welch, 1988). C'est par l'intermédiaire de cette institution que le groupe minoritaire a fait le plus valoir ses droits et s'est le plus mobilisé (Heller, 1994; Welch, 1988). L'école n'était pas, cependant, la seule institution responsable de la reproduction linguistique et culturelle. L'Église et la famille y participaient aussi activement. Jusqu'au moment de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, la population francophone de l'Ontario vivait encore principalement à la campagne, était relativement homogène et privilégiait surtout la langue française et la religion catholique en termes de pratiques culturelles.

L'Église a ainsi joué un rôle de première importance dans l'établissement des institutions franco-ontariennes, dont en particulier les écoles (Welch, 1988). Mais avec le phénomène de l'industrialisation et de l'exode vers la ville, l'arrivée massive de francophones de l'extérieur de l'Ontario et l'intervention accrue de l'État au niveau de la communauté (Welch, 1991), l'influence de l'Église catholique dans la communauté francophone a sensiblement diminué au cours des années qui ont suivi. Comme le souligne Dubé (1993), la minorité française canadienne est passée de catholique française à francophone bilingue. Il n'en demeure pas moins cependant que la présence de l'Église continue quand même à se faire sentir de nos jours, même si c'est de façon parfois ambiguë.[2] De l'avis de Welch (1991) «la religion catholique continue à jouer un rôle qui n'est pas toujours clair et demeure souvent contradictoire» (p. 112).

De son côté, la famille n'est plus toujours en mesure d'assurer la reproduction linguistique et culturelle, puisqu'elle se voit elle-même, dans certains cas, assimilée au groupe majoritaire (Williams, 1987). L'exogamie en milieu minoritaire représente, entre autres, un facteur important qui explique les transferts linguistiques du français vers l'anglais (Bernard, 1991). Cependant, il n'y a pas qu'en situation de mariage mixte que le phénomène de l'assimilation se fait sentir. Même dans les familles où les deux parents sont francophones et possèdent le français comme langue d'usage, on note une bilinguisation croissante des enfants à mesure qu'ils vieillissent (Cardinal, Lapointe, & Thériault, 1988). Ce phénomène peut s'expliquer, en partie, par un milieu social de plus en

plus influencé par le groupe majoritaire anglophone—utilisation de l'anglais à l'école, avec les amis et amies, la télévision et les activités sociales et culturelles (cinéma, théâtre) qui ont lieu principalement en anglais. Or, si l'on prend comme point de départ que l'ethnicité d'un individu est le résultat de relations socialement construites (Barth, 1969; Juteau-Lee, 1983) et que les premiers rapports sociaux de l'enfant s'établissent en majorité au sein de la famille, on peut en déduire que la langue utilisée au foyer va influencer la construction de l'identité chez l'enfant. On peut même aller plus loin en disant que la langue constitue un élément central de la construction de l'identité d'un individu (Heller, 1994). Si le milieu familial n'est pas en mesure d'assurer la reproduction de la langue française, on peut alors se demander comment l'enfant parviendra à s'identifier, comme membre à part entière, à la communauté francophone.

On peut ainsi constater que la communauté francophone est passée d'une population rurale relativement homogène sur les plans linguistique et culturel à une population urbaine de plus en plus hétérogène en ce qui a trait à la langue (Mougeon et Heller, 1986). À cela vient s'ajouter la dispersion géographique de la population franco-ontarienne, phénomène qui a aussi contribué à la transformation de la communauté. La montée du capitalisme a obligé une grande partie de la population francophone à s'établir dans les grands centres urbains, notamment dans le sud et le sud-ouest de la province, où les francophones sont minoritaires. Ce morcellement sur le plan géographique a donc eu un impact sur la communauté.

Dans les écoles, cela se traduit concrètement par une clientèle scolaire qui vient de foyers hétérogènes sur les plans linguistique et culturel, où élèves franco-dominants, anglo-dominants (Mougeon, Heller, Beniak, & Canale, 1984) et de diverses origines ethniques se côtoient quotidiennement. Les élèves anglo-dominants représentent d'ailleurs un segment de la population scolaire dont l'influence n'est pas à négliger. Ces élèves viennent en grande partie de familles où le français n'est plus ou n'a jamais été la langue d'usage. Dans cette catégorie se retrouvent spécifiquement deux groupes d'élèves, les *ayants-droit* et les anglophones. Les ayants-droit sont ceux et celles qui, selon l'article 23 de la *Charte canadienne des droits et libertés*, peuvent recevoir leur éducation dans la langue de la minorité officielle.[3] Dans le cas des élèves anglophones, ce sont souvent des enfants qui, ayant passé par l'immersion française, ont été admis à l'école par le biais d'un comité d'admission.[4] Or, tout porte à croire que les objectifs de l'école minoritaire de langue française sont demeurés les mêmes que dans le passé, bien que le milieu de vie se soit sensiblement transformé au cours des trente dernières années. Ces objectifs reflètent encore la réalité d'une communauté qui serait homogène sur les plans de la langue, de la culture et de son identité. Le système scolaire se donne toujours comme mission de veiller à la reproduction de la langue et de la culture françaises et au maintien et renforcement de l'identité collective. Mais comment l'école, en tant qu'agent de reproduction sociale et culturelle, arrive-t-elle à composer avec cette réalité tout en gardant un rôle mobilisateur puisque, comme le soulignent Mougeon et Heller (1986), le rôle tenu historiquement par l'école, en ce qui a trait au maintien de la langue et de la culture françaises, s'appuyait sur une communauté fortement homogène sur les plans linguistique et culturel. Comment alors l'école peut-elle toujours poursuivre ces mêmes objectifs sans l'appui d'une communauté homogène solide? C'est là que les tensions, voire les contradictions, se font le plus sentir, car tout en étant aussi important qu'auparavant, le rôle politique de l'école devient de plus en plus difficile à réaliser étant donné la diversité maintenant présente dans les institutions scolaires et le manque de cohérence en ce qui a trait à une vision commune de l'école.[5] L'école se retrouve dans une position quelque peu contradictoire, étant donné qu'elle doit reproduire une langue, une culture et un sens d'appartenance parfois inconnus de la clientèle scolaire et de la communauté qui gravite autour de l'école. Le milieu de l'éducation tient relativement peu compte des remous qu'a connus la communauté francophone au cours des der-

nières décennies. Mais comme le mentionne Welch (1991), «tous ces changements dans les rapports internes et externes ont eu un impact sur la façon dont les Franco-Ontariens perçoivent l'éducation de leurs enfants» (p. 113). Ces changements indiquent un besoin pour l'école de redéfinir la relation qu'elle entretient avec la communauté.

Relations entre l'école et la communauté

L'école minoritaire de langue française se retrouve au coeur même de la communauté, non pas au sens géographique ou spatial du terme, mais plutôt au sens de la responsabilité sociale et politique que cette institution détient face au groupe minoritaire. C'est pourquoi il est important, lorsqu'on tente d'examiner la relation qui existe entre l'école et la communauté, de ne pas s'en tenir uniquement à ce qui se passe à l'intérieur de l'école, mais également à l'extérieur des murs de l'institution. De cette façon, nous sommes plus en mesure de comprendre comment s'articulent les rapports qu'entretient l'école avec la communauté et de mieux comprendre surtout le sens à donner à la notion d'école communautaire. Bryk et Driscoll (1988) reconnaissent deux visages à ce concept. Une école communautaire peut être définie comme étant un milieu de vie où la communauté éducative est en mesure de s'épanouir pleinement. Par communauté éducative, on entend ici la communauté interne de l'école, c'est-à-dire, le personnel de direction, le personnel enseignant, le personnel de soutien, les élèves et les parents. Toujours selon Bryk et Driscoll (1988), pour être en mesure de dire d'une école qu'elle constitue une communauté éducative, cette dernière doit posséder les trois composantes suivantes:

1. C'est une école qui partage des valeurs et des buts communs avec les membres de la communauté éducative; les membres partagent aussi une vision commune; enfin les membres participent aux activités de l'école;
2. c'est une école qui possède des activités communes qui favorisent à la fois l'interaction entre ses membres et des traditions communes; et
3. c'est une école qui prend à coeur le bien-être de ses membres en entretenant des relations de travail qui favorisent le respect et l'estime de soi.

L'autre visage qui peut être donné à l'école communautaire est celui d'un milieu de vie dont peut bénéficier la communauté d'intérêt et qui va contribuer de cette façon à son épanouissement. Par communauté d'intérêt, on entend la communauté externe, c'est-à-dire, la population qui partage des intérêts communs ou qui vit dans le quartier de l'école (Gérin-Lajoie, 1995). Cette deuxième définition fait directement référence à la notion d'*école dans la communauté*, où le partenariat représente l'élément central (Jeffers et Olebe, 1994; Mawhinney, 1993).

Dans le contexte des écoles minoritaires de langue française, la communauté éducative a été vue, traditionnellement, comme étant étroitement liée à la communauté d'intérêt. Mais avec les changements qu'a connus la communauté franco-ontarienne depuis la Seconde Guerre mondiale, il est parfois difficile d'y retrouver une forme quelconque de complémentarité. Dans le cas à l'étude dans le contexte du présent article, celui de l'ESPC, j'examinerai spécifiquement le deuxième visage de l'école communautaire, c'est-à-dire, celui qui concerne la relation qu'entretient l'école avec la communauté d'intérêt, par le biais de partenariats spécifiques.

Méthodologie

L'étude de cas qui sert à illustrer la présente réflexion a été effectuée dans le cadre d'une recherche nationale portant sur l'école secondaire canadienne.[6] Pour les besoins du présent article, je me limiterai à l'analyse des rapports entre l'école et la communauté.[7] La cueillette des données a été effectuée pendant l'année scolaire 1993-1994. L'analyse qualitative a été privilégiée comme approche méthodologique et trois techniques de cueillette de données ont été utilisées, soit (a) l'observation, (b) l'entrevue semi-dirigée et c) l'analyse documentaire.

En ce qui concerne l'observation, l'équipe de recherche, composée de la chercheure principale et de son adjointe de recherche, a fait des séjours répétés à l'ESPC, soit quatre séjours d'une semaine chacun pendant l'année scolaire. Un total de soixante-deux observations ont été effectuées. Elles se sont déroulées en grande partie en salle de classe, au moment des leçons. Tous les cours ont été observés. Pendant notre dernier séjour, nous avons sélectionné six élèves que nous avons suivis individuellement pendant une journée entière. La fréquence des séjours à l'école a permis de mieux comprendre la vie d'une école minoritaire de langue française, avec tout ce que cela comporte de tensions et de contradictions.

Trente-huit entrevues individuelles et vingt entrevues de groupes ont été réalisées dans le cadre de la recherche. La durée de ces entrevues semi-dirigées a été d'environ une heure chacune. Nous avons interrogé le personnel administratif, le personnel enseignant, les élèves, les parents et les membres de la communauté environnante. La plupart des entrevues ont eu lieu à l'école. Elles ont été enregistrées sur magnétophone pour ensuite être retranscrites en entier, pour fins d'analyse.

Pour ce qui est de l'analyse documentaire, ce sont surtout les programmes d'études du ministère de l'Éducation et de la Formation de l'Ontario qui ont été examinés. Du matériel ayant trait à l'ESPC comme par exemple, la mission du conseil scolaire, la mission de l'école et le journal de l'école, a aussi été analysé.

Dans le cadre de la recherche nationale, nous avons étudié, entre autres, la relation entre l'école et la communauté et l'influence que l'une exerce sur l'autre.[8] C'est ce dont je discuterai dans les pages qui suivent. Mais auparavant, j'esquisserai un bref portrait de l'école en prenant soin de situer cette dernière dans son contexte social.

L'École secondaire de Pain Court se trouve dans une région agricole du sud-ouest de l'Ontario, à Pain Court, un village francophone situé entre London et Windsor. Le comté de Kent, où est située l'école, compte une population de 109,943 habitants et habitantes. La population de langue maternelle française (réponses uniques et réponses multiples) s'y élève à environ 4 %. Cependant, ce pourcentage baisse à 1,5 % lorsqu'on examine la proportion des francophones dont le français est encore la langue d'usage (Statistique Canada, 1993). L'influence du groupe majoritaire anglophone y est donc importante et l'assimilation forte.

L'ESPC appartient à un conseil scolaire catholique qui compte vingt-quatre écoles élémentaires, dont quatre de langue maternelle française et deux écoles secondaires, dont une de langue maternelle française.[9] On compte 16 conseillers et conseillères scolaires, dont trois francophones, élus pour représenter spécifiquement les intérêts des contribuables francophones. Cependant, il est à remarquer que plusieurs des conseillers et conseillères anglophones sont de descendance française, même si leur langue d'usage est l'anglais. En 1993-1994, au moment de la cueillette des données, l'école secondaire de langue française comptait 209 élèves. Le personnel enseignant s'élèvait à vingt-deux personnes, toutes de langue maternelle française, sauf dans le cas de la spécialiste de l'anglais, de langue maternelle anglaise. On y retrouvait aussi une monitrice de langues et une bibliothécaire à temps plein. Le personnel enseignant était relativement jeune et dynamique, avec peu d'années d'expérience. De son côté, la clientèle scolaire venait de trois écoles élémentaires du conseil scolaire; 30 % environ de cette clientèle habitait un foyer où la langue maternelle était l'anglais.[10] Parmi les élèves francophones, plusieurs disaient avoir l'anglais comme langue d'usage à la maison. L'ESPC possédait une clientèle scolaire hétérogène sur le plan linguistique et l'anglais dominait dans les rapports entre élèves, peu importe la langue maternelle.

Les liens avec la communauté

Avant 1986, l'ESPC appartenait au conseil scolaire public non-confessionnel et même si l'école était, en principe, de langue française, en pratique ce n'était pas toujours le cas. Comme l'explique une ancienne enseignante:

> c'était une école de langue française, donc le petit jeune avait toujours le droit de s'exprimer en français ... il avait le droit d'obtenir ses cours en français, mais l'obstacle qui se présentait c'est qu'on ne pouvait pas toujours trouver du personnel qualifié pour tel ou tel domaine. Donc c'est comme ça qu'on avait certains enseignants anglophones. (Entrevue ADM 7, p. 14)

À cette époque, l'école ne comptait que cinquante-six élèves. Au moment du transfert au système scolaire catholique, les représentants et représentantes de l'éducation en langue française ont mis de l'avant un plan de développement stratégique, dont les objectifs étaient d'améliorer les programmes d'études et le lieu physique de l'école, ainsi que d'amener les élèves à développer un sens d'appartenance à la communauté francophone. Le plan de développement stratégique dont il est ici question constituait en fait un plan de renouveau francophone, qui voulait favoriser l'épanouissement de la francophonie à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur des murs de l'école. On voulait que l'école devienne un véritable milieu de vie francophone au service de la communauté. On s'était donc donné comme mandat de créer une école communautaire de langue française à la fois au service de la clientèle scolaire qu'elle dessert et au service de la communauté francophone de la région. Le principal artisan de ce plan de renouveau francophone s'exprime ainsi:

> je crois que le gros de mon travail depuis que je suis ici ... c'est d'essayer de réveiller cette francophonie dormante, cette francophonie, qui d'après moi, se noyait dans l'anglais. (Entrevue ADM 4, p. 3)

Le conseil scolaire et l'école ont alors travaillé d'arrache-pied pour redonner vie à l'école. On a d'abord réaménagé l'école afin de la rendre plus attrayante pour les élèves. On y a construit un nouveau gymnase. On a amélioré et diversifié les programmes d'études. Au moment de la cueillette des données, on comptait, au total, 117 cours à l'ESPC. Enfin, on s'est tourné vers la communauté afin de resserrer les liens entre celle-ci et l'école, afin de dépasser le cadre scolaire en faveur d'une intervention sur le plan communautaire.

À cause de son rôle de reproduction linguistique, sociale et culturelle, il devient difficile de dissocier l'école minoritaire de langue française de la communauté d'intérêt qu'elle dessert. Cependant, il semble que de nos jours les liens qui existent entre les deux sont parfois assez lâches. On constate que les interventions se limitent souvent à la communauté éducative, comme c'est le cas dans la plupart des écoles situées en milieu majoritaire.

L'ESPC constitue l'exception à la règle. Depuis le début des années quatre-vingt-dix l'école, par le biais du conseil scolaire, a établi plusieurs partenariats avec la communauté d'intérêt afin de favoriser des rapports plus étroits dans le but de créer un milieu de vie plus francophone dans la région. On peut constater que même si certains villages de la région sont considérés comme étant francophones, l'assimilation au groupe majoritaire anglophone s'y fait quand même pressante. En effet, près de deux francophones sur trois qui vivent dans cette région de la province perdent la capacité de s'exprimer en français au cours de leur vie (Ministère des Collèges et Universités, 1989). La minorité linguistique doit donc mettre en place un mécanisme qui permette de freiner le plus possible le phénomène de l'anglicisation. C'est ce que l'ESPC a tenté de faire en mettant en oeuvre son plan de renouveau francophone. On a décidé de travailler de concert avec la communauté, étant donné que l'école ne peut survivre sans elle et que la communauté francophone, de son côté, ne peut pas survivre sans l'école. Les partenariats qui ont été établis font partie de ce plan de renouveau. Ils ont réussi à créer des liens solides entre l'école et la communauté, comme nous le verrons dans les pages qui suivent.

Un des objectifs du plan de renouveau francophone était de favoriser une plus grande ouverture sur la francophonie. Comme l'a mentionné le directeur-adjoint du conseil scolaire:

> aussitôt que tu fais un partenariat avec quelqu'un d'autre, tu grandis, donc le vrai bon sens me dit, le gros bon sens me dit aussi que les écoles doivent arrêter d'être des monuments, des édifices qui soient en usage pour une tranche de la journée à des millions, puis des millions de dollars dans l'économie. Ça ne devrait plus fonctionner comme ça, il faudrait qu'on soit un centre d'éducation peut-être vingt-quatre heures par jour, ce serait l'idéal. (Entrevue ADM 3, p. 48)

Sur le plan financier, il s'est avéré qu'un partenaire important de l'école a été le canton de Dover. Le personnel administratif du canton a décidé de fournir un soutien financier au conseil scolaire parce qu'on voulait conserver l'éducation de langue française, mais surtout garder à Pain Court la communauté qui gravite autour de l'école. En effet, au début des années quatre-vingt-dix, il y avait eu une consultation auprès de la communauté afin de décider d'un emplacement permanent pour l'ESPC, c'est-à-dire, la garder définitivement à Pain Court ou la déménager à Chatham, petite localité anglophone située à quelques kilomètres de Pain Court. Si l'école déménageait, cela voudrait dire sans aucun doute la fin du village de Pain Court et la fin de la francophonie pour cette région. Le canton de Dover se voyait donc menacé par l'exode probable de plusieurs citoyens et citoyennes. Une représentante du canton de Dover explique:

> le conseil (du canton de Dover) a réalisé que c'était une véritable opportunité d'aider non seulement l'école, mais la communauté en entier. Parce que Dover perdrait au niveau de tout le conseil, si l'école disparaissait et qu'ils ont vraiment senti qu'elle appartenait aux francophones de la région, non pas à Chatham, où elle aurait bien pu s'en aller. (Traduction libre, Entrevue COM 1, p. 4)

Le conseil scolaire a alors collaboré avec le canton de Dover afin d'obtenir de l'aide financière du ministère de la Culture, du Tourisme et des Loisirs de l'Ontario. Cet argent a permis d'améliorer les installations intérieures et extérieures de l'ESPC et de faire de cette école un centre de ressources et de loisirs pour la communauté.

Le premier projet fut la construction d'un gymnase. L'ancien gymnase de l'école était désuet et les jeunes ne pouvaient pas vraiment y pratiquer leurs activités sportives. La nouvelle installation profite non seulement aux élèves, mais aussi aux membres de la communauté puisque les portes de l'école leur sont ouvertes et qu'ils l'utilisent de façon régulière.

Le projet communautaire qui a suivi immédiatement la construction du gymnase fut la création d'un parc et la conceptualisation d'un projet d'agriculture, projet auquel ont participé l'école et la communauté environnante.

À la suite de négociations fructueuses avec le canton de Dover et le gouvernement, l'école a été en mesure d'acheter le terrain adjacent à l'école afin de pouvoir réaliser ces deux projets. Un membre du personnel participant au projet en fait ici un bref historique:

> Oui, avec l'agrandissement de l'école, il fallait qu'on déplace le terrain de baseball puis il y avait même la possibilité de déménager l'école à Chatham, mais ils ont cru bon de rester ici, puis plutôt, d'acheter un terrain en arrière de l'école. C'est certain qu'on n'avait pas besoin de 44 acres, mais ça avait l'air que le fermier voulait vendre tout le terrain dans un morceau. Alors avec les octrois, le canton de Dover, le conseil scolaire se sont tous mis ensemble et finalement, on a acheté tout le terrain. (Entrevue COM 4, p. 2)

C'est alors que le conseil scolaire, en accord avec l'école et la communauté, a décidé de prendre la moitié du terrain pour en faire un parc et l'autre moitié pour mettre sur

pied un projet agricole, dont le but était d'initier les élèves de l'école à l'agriculture, une des principales sources d'activité économique de la région. Comme le fait remarquer un membre de la communauté:

> Dans ce coin-ci, c'est la terre la plus fertile qu'il n'y a pas au Canada. C'est bien diversifié. On sème du blé d'Inde, des fèves soya et beaucoup de végétaux, des oignons, des patates, des betteraves rouges. On a beaucoup de vergers aussi, des pommes. (Entrevue COM 3, p. 3)

Le projet d'agriculture allait être aussi avantageux pour l'école que pour la communauté, puisqu'il permettrait de développer des cours en français dans le domaine de la technologie, où l'ESPC voulait définitivement innover afin de répondre à la demande expresse des parents, des élèves et de certains membres de la communauté, qui ont souvent fait remarquer que l'école demeurait encore trop orientée vers les études universitaires.

Le parc, pour sa part, a été inauguré en août 1993. Il comprend une piste de course de quatre-cents mètres, une piste cyclable et de marche, une forêt carolinienne, un musée d'arbres et un musée d'équipement agricole. En ce qui concerne le projet d'agriculture, un comité a été formé avec des représentantes et représentants de tous les niveaux. On y retrouve deux membres du personnel enseignant, quatre élèves et six agriculteurs francophones de la région (qui, dans plusieurs cas, sont aussi des parents d'élèves). Les agriculteurs ont trouvé l'idée d'un projet agricole excellente. Comme en fait foi ce témoignage:

> Bien mon opinion personnelle, c'est que j'ai trouvé que c'était très bon parce qu'il y a plusieurs affaires, comme ça, on peut dire au point de vue des finances ... de l'agriculture, ils apprennent pas ça à l'école ... je trouve qu'on avait une chance ici sur un projet très unique dans la région et puis je pense qu'on a la location idéale, l'environnement idéal pour essayer ce projet. (Entrevue COM 4, p. 4)

Il avait été également décidé, qu'à l'intérieur de ce projet, l'ESPC offrirait des cours à crédit qui débuteraient en janvier 1994. Néanmoins, on voulait se servir de la terre avant cette date. Le comité a donc décidé d'ensemencer les champs au printemps 1993 dans le but d'obtenir ainsi une première récolte. On s'était alors mis d'accord pour planter du maïs et des fèves de soya, qui sont les spécialités de la région. Plusieurs agriculteurs de la communauté ont contribué au projet pendant l'été en donnant la semence, en prêtant leurs appareils agricoles et en aidant eux-mêmes à ensemencer les champs et à récolter les légumes à la fin de l'été. En même temps, le conseil scolaire fut en mesure d'obtenir un octroi gouvernemental et d'embaucher trois élèves du palier secondaire et deux étudiants du palier collégial pour l'été, afin de s'occuper du projet. La récolte a rapporté quelques milliers de dollars qui ont été déposés à la banque et qui seront utilisés pour la construction d'une grange.

Sur le plan du contenu scolaire, le programme d'agriculture comporte trois volets: transport, communication et construction. Les élèves qui veulent s'inscrire au programme doivent être en 11^{e} et 12^{e} années et posséder certains pré-requis. L'enseignant responsable d'élaborer les cours a fait remarquer, lors d'une entrevue, que le projet agricole était important parce qu'il donnait la possibilité aux jeunes de se familiariser avec le domaine de l'agriculture.

Finalement, un dernier projet est en voie de réalisation. Il s'agit de la construction d'une bibliothèque scolaire-communautaire ainsi que de nouvelles salles de classe pour répondre aux besoins technologiques de l'école (centres de fabrication, de communication, de construction et services, d'arts et de musique). La bibliothèque va répondre aux besoins de la population francophone de la région, tant auprès des élèves qu'auprès de la communauté. Présentement, la région ne possède rien de tel. Le canton de Dover a, en effet, fermé sa bibliothèque en 1983. Ce qui signifie que les gens de la région doivent se

rendre dans les municipalités avoisinantes pour recevoir des services de bibliothèque et emprunter du matériel qui, la plupart du temps, est en anglais. Enfin, les nouvelles salles de classe répondent aux besoins grandissants de l'ESPC dans le domaine de la technologie.

Le plan de renouveau francophone s'est traduit en projets on ne peut plus concrets, de même que bénéfiques pour la communauté d'intérêt. Celle-ci a d'ailleurs réagi de façon très positive à toutes ces activités de renouveau. Les parents, tant francophones qu'anglophones, ont affirmé, de leur côté, qu'ils croyaient que c'était une bonne chose. On améliore l'école, de même que les services disponibles dans la communauté. Certains des parents vont jusqu'à dire que sans l'école, la communauté francophone perdrait tout et que les projets ont contribué à développer une certaine fierté dans la communauté. On ajoute que les élèves qui participent à ces projets acquièrent une expérience des plus enrichissantes. La communauté, elle aussi, voit d'un très bon oeil la présence de plus en plus visible de l'école dans la communauté, parce que les projets contribuent au développement de la région. Comme l'expliquent ces interlocuteurs:

> Oui, je trouve que le parc là, ça va faire une grosse différence, euh, ça va amener les parents et pis, euh, le vieux gym qu'y avait, converti en un centre communautaire, euh, qui va donner la chance aux élèves d'avoir des concerts, des rencontres de toutes sortes. (Entrevue PAR 2, p. 34)

> l'école est ici pour servir les besoins de la communauté. Que ce soit les gens, disons, ceux qui sont plus âgés ... c'est très important qu'ils aient accès à l'école comme un lieu d'apprentissage, ou même un lieu pour faire des exercices, des sports. (Entrevue COM 4, p. 24-25)

Avec ce regain de vie dans la région, il devient ainsi possible pour la communauté francophone—et même anglophone—du village de Pain Court et des environs de bénéficier des retombées de ces projets. En particulier, le projet d'agriculture ouvre la porte à une gamme de possibilités pour cette région rurale du sud-ouest ontarien.

Tensions associées au processus de reproduction linguistique, sociale et culturelle de l'école en milieu minoritaire

Il ne fait pas de doute que le plan de renouveau francophone mis de l'avant à Pain Court, particulièrement en ce qui a trait aux relations entre l'école et la communauté, semble porter fruit. Grâce à l'entrepreneurship démontré au niveau du conseil scolaire et de l'école, la présence francophone se fait de plus en plus visible dans la communauté avoisinante. Toutefois, il faut quand même se demander si de telles actions entreprises dans la communauté sont suffisantes pour permettre une reproduction linguistique, sociale et culturelle véritable, qui permettra de reproduire (et dans plusieurs cas de produire) des petits et des petites francophones, qui veilleront à leur tour à la sauvegarde de la langue et de la culture françaises. On peut noter, en effet, la présence de diverses tensions lorsqu'on examine le rôle de reproduction de l'école située en milieu minoritaire, vu la nature même de la communauté d'intérêt. Il s'avère d'ailleurs impossible de faire disparaître complètement ces tensions. Trois d'entre elles attirent particulièrement l'attention. Il s'agit (a) du manque de soutien des autres institutions en ce qui a trait à la reproduction de la langue et de la culture françaises; (b) des attentes diversifiées de la part de la communauté face au rôle de l'école en milieu minoritaire et (c) de la perception des élèves de leur propre identité.

La tension la plus importante dans le présent contexte est certes celle du manque de soutien de la part des autres institutions en ce qui a trait à la reproduction de la langue et de la culture françaises. En effet, dans bien des cas, on en remet à l'école l'entière responsabilité. Les attentes sont donc grandes de la part de certains parents qui misent sur l'école pour, entre autres, franciser leurs enfants, c'est-à-dire, leur apprendre à parler

français ou à les refranciser. Or, des études ont montré que l'école a elle seule ne peut garantir la parfaite maîtrise d'une langue si celle-ci n'est utilisée que dans ce cadre institutionnel particulier (Mougeon et Heller, 1986). On constate que l'organisation de l'école tient difficilement compte de l'hétérogénéité de la clientèle scolaire; ce qui représente d'ailleurs un problème de taille pour plusieurs enseignants et enseignantes. Plutôt formé pour un enseignement en milieu majoritaire, le personnel enseignant des écoles minoritaires de langue française se voit confronté à une réalité à laquelle il n'est pas prêt à faire face (Gérin-Lajoie, 1993a). Comment faire, par exemple, que la présence d'une clientèle scolaire anglo-dominante ne ralentisse pas le processus d'apprentissage de la clientèle franco-dominante et bilingue (Mougeon et Heller, 1986)?[11] Nous pouvons aussi constater que le système scolaire franco-ontarien insiste sur l'importance de transmettre la culture. Mais de quelle culture est-il ici question? Cette notion demeure encore des plus vagues dans le contexte minoritaire. En présence d'une communauté d'intérêt qui n'est pas homogène sur les plans linguistique, social et culturel, il devient souvent difficile de décider quelle culture «maternelle» enseigner (Laforge, 1993). Des efforts ont cependant été faits par le ministère de l'Éducation et de la Formation de l'Ontario pour tenter de clarifier ce concept et de mettre en place des mesures concrètes qui ont pour objectif principal d'assurer la reproduction de la culture dans les écoles. Il s'agit, en particulier, de l'animation culturelle. Ce sont des interventions plutôt ponctuelles qui se traduisent en grande partie par des activités culturelles. Malgré le bien-fondé de ce programme d'intervention, l'école réussit difficilement à sensibiliser véritablement les élèves à la réalité du milieu minoritaire (Gérin-Lajoie, 1995). Dans le contexte actuel et même en situation de partenariats avec la communauté, l'école ne peut pas à elle seule, sans l'appui spécifique de la famille, assurer la survie d'une langue et d'une culture.

La deuxième tension concerne le manque de consensus face aux attentes des membres de la communauté vis-à-vis l'école. La communauté d'intérêt est divisée quant au rôle à donner à l'école minoritaire de langue française. Les attentes dépendent en grande partie du groupe linguistique auquel appartiennent les membres de la communauté. L'étude réalisée à l'ESPC montre en effet que les parents francophones ont choisi l'école de langue française afin d'assurer la survie de la langue et de la culture françaises. Dans le cas des parents anglophones, c'est l'attrait du bilinguisme qui a motivé le choix de l'école. Pour ce segment de la communauté, la culture et le sens d'appartenance au groupe minoritaire sont relégués au second plan. Ces résultats sont semblables à ceux d'une étude menée par Heller (1987a) qui est arrivée à la conclusion que les familles francophones, qu'elle a qualifiées de «familles du noyau», où les enfants sont franco-dominants misent sur l'école pour la transmission du capital linguistique et du capital culturel afin de minimiser l'assimilation au groupe anglophone majoritaire. En ce qui a trait aux familles dont les enfants sont anglo-dominants, qu'elle a identifiées comme étant des «familles à la périphérie», ces dernières insistent uniquement sur la transmission du capital linguistique, sur l'acquisition d'une langue seconde à des fins économiques. Comment l'école peut-elle alors arriver à composer avec ces deux réalités, dont l'une est spécifiquement en désaccord avec la mission de l'école de langue française qui est de sauvegarder la culture française?

La dernière tension dont je veux parler est celle liée à la perception des élèves face à leur identité. Comme agent de reproduction, l'école devrait en principe arriver à transmettre les valeurs associées à la francophonie et ainsi réussir à reproduire la langue et la culture qui reflètent l'appartenance au groupe minoritaire de langue française. Or, il semble que les élèves qui fréquentent le système scolaire de langue française se perçoivent plus comme des bilingues que comme des francophones et, à la limite, des anglophones. Dans une de ses études, Heller (1987b) en vient à la conclusion que les élèves qu'elle a observés se trouvent à la «frontière du français et de l'anglais» (p. 195). Mais lequel de ces deux mondes représente le plus fidèlement l'appartenance ethnique des

élèves? C'est une question à laquelle il est difficile de répondre. Les données recueillies à Pain Court arrivent à la même conclusion que celle de Heller et indiquent que plus de la moitié des élèves qui ont participé à l'étude se définissent comme des bilingues. Il faut maintenant se demander si une identité bilingue peut véritablement exister ou si une telle forme de représentation identitaire ne fait pas plutôt partie d'une démarche menant à l'assimilation. Cette question mérite sans aucun doute une réflexion plus approfondie dans le contexte du milieu minoritaire actuel et pourrait d'ailleurs faire l'objet d'études subséquentes.

Conclusion

L'école minoritaire de langue française doit s'adapter à une communauté d'intérêt qui a subi des changements majeurs au cours des dernières années. Comme le souligne Cardinal (1994), «la communauté ne peut plus se présenter comme une réalité homogène et transcendante. Elle se voit plutôt comme un espace, une valeur à partir de laquelle les individus sont appelés à participer volontairement à son développement» (p. 72). Les implications sont donc grandes pour l'école minoritaire de langue française qui, dans son mandat, doit répondre aux besoins de sa clientèle scolaire, tout en assurant la reproduction de la langue et de la culture françaises. À cause des transformations récentes subies au sein du groupe minoritaire, la relation entre l'école et la communauté se doit d'être redéfinie à partir des nouveaux groupes en présence, tout en tenant compte des multiples tensions qui s'y trouvent.

Ajoutons en dernier lieu que la présence de ces tensions ne devrait pas empêcher l'établissement de partenariats solides entre l'école et la communauté, puisque ces liens renforcent la présence francophone sur la scène socio-politique et même dans certains cas, sur la scène économique, comme c'est le cas dans la communauté de l'ESPC. La reproduction linguistique, sociale et culturelle qui prend place à l'école ne peut pas se faire en vase clos, elle doit en effet tenir compte de la communauté dans laquelle elle s'effectue.

Notes

1. J'aimerais remercier le rédacteur et la rédactrice invités et les deux évaluateurs ou évaluatrices pour les excellents commentaires fournis lors d'une première version de cet article.
2. Par exemple, même si les francophones catholiques pratiquants se font moins nombreux qu'avant, plusieurs choisissent encore d'envoyer leurs enfants à l'école catholique, non pas pour des raisons idéologiques, mais plutôt pour des raisons pratiques. Les écoles non-confessionnelles étant encore moins nombreuses que les écoles catholiques, il arrive que les parents décident d'envoyer leurs enfants à l'école confessionnelle dans le but de leur assurer une éducation en langue française.
3. Pour être reconnu comme un ayant-droit, un enfant doit avoir des parents qui sont citoyens et citoyennes canadiens et (a) qui ont comme première langue apprise et encore comprise celle de la minorité officielle de la province, ou (b) qui ont fréquenté une école primaire dans la langue de la minorité et résider dans une province où la langue d'instruction est celle de la minorité, ou encore (c) qui ont déjà un enfant qui a reçu ou reçoit son éducation dans la langue de la minorité officielle.
4. Ce comité est formé de la direction de l'école, d'un représentant ou d'une représentante du conseil scolaire et d'un membre du personnel enseignant de l'école.
5. Les raisons pour inscrire un ou une élève dans une école minoritaire de langue française sont en effet diverses. Dans certains cas, on veut sauvegarder la langue et la culture françaises, alors que dans d'autres cas, on insiste sur l'acquisition d'une langue seconde pour des raisons économiques. Voir à ce sujet Gérin-Lajoie (1995) et Welch (1991).
6. La recherche nationale a été réalisée par l'Association canadienne d'éducation, grâce à l'appui financier du ministère fédéral du Développement des ressources humaines. Une équipe de chercheurs et chercheures représentant les différentes régions du pays ont produit vingt et une études de cas, dont celle sur l'*École secondaire de Pain Court*, pour laquelle j'ai agi à titre de chercheure principale. Je tiens ici à remercier Sylvie Lemay, adjointe de recherche à l'Institut d'études pédagogiques de l'Ontario, qui a participé à la cueillette des données. Le

rapport national, les études de cas ainsi qu'une bande vidéo sont disponibles au bureau de l'Association canadienne d'éducation à Toronto.

7. Pour l'analyse complète des données, voir D. Gérin-Lajoie *L'école secondaire de Pain Court: une étude de cas* publiée en 1995 par l'Association canadienne d'éducation.
8. Les quatre autres domaines analysés ont été (a) la perception de la communauté éducative en ce qui a trait à la réussite des élèves de l'ESPC; (b) l'influence de l'organisation et des processus sociaux ayant cours à l'école dans la promotion d'un environnement favorisant la réussite; (c) l'influence de caractéristiques particulières concernant la vie de l'élève et finalement, (d) la prévention du décrochage.
9. Les cours dans ces écoles sont offerts uniquement en français (sauf bien entendu pour les cours d'anglais langue seconde) et le matériel scolaire est celui utilisé dans les écoles de langue maternelle française, non pas celui utilisé dans les classes d'immersion française.
10. Ces élèves venaient, en grande partie, des écoles élémentaires de langue française de la région, où ils et elles avaient été admis, même si leur langue maternelle n'était pas le français. Il arrive en effet que lorsque le nombre d'élèves n'est pas suffisant pour justifier l'ouverture d'une école de langue française, un conseil scolaire décide d'accueillir, par le biais d'un comité d'admission, un certain nombre d'anglophones afin d'atteindre les effectifs scolaires requis. C'est une pratique qui existe aussi dans d'autres conseils scolaires de la province.
11. Pour résoudre ce problème, des programmes d'*actualisation linguistique* et de *perfectionnement linguistique* sont maintenant offerts dans les écoles. Ils s'adressent aux enfants dont les compétences en français sont faibles. Certaines écoles possèdent aussi des classes d'accueil pour ceux et celles qui arrivent à l'école et qui ne possèdent pas les compétences appropriées en français. Il n'en demeure pas moins que la salle de classe régulière demeure encore passablement hétérogène sur le plan linguistique et que le personnel enseignant doit composer avec cette réalité.

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The Tensions Within: Diversity in a Multi-Everything Secondary School

This article examines philosophical tensions over the fundamental purposes of secondary education in one large, urban, composite secondary school. In its efforts to accommodate the widely varying needs of a diverse student population, the school has developed an expanded range of curricular options and special programs, many of which focus on the social and developmental needs of underachieving students. These programs have heightened tensions among the school's staff who hold various views of the academic and socialization functions of the school. These philosophical rifts occur at a time when external demands for increased measurable achievement in an academic sense are becoming a significant element of public accountability.

Cet article examine les tensions philosophiques vis-à-vis les besoins fondamentaux de l'éducation secondaire dans une très grande école polyvalente urbaine. Afin d'accommoder la grande diversité des besoins de leur population variée d'étudiants et d'étudiantes, l'école s'est efforcée d'augmenter le choix de cours complémentaires en offrant divers options curriculaires et des programmes spéciaux surtout en vue de répondre aux besoins sociaux et de développement des élèves sous-performants. L'introduction de ces programmes a aggravé davantage les tensions entre les membres du corps professionnel qui ont déjà différentes opinions concernant les rôles académiques et socialisateurs de l'école. Ces écarts d'opinions philosophiques se présentent en même temps que les exigences externes de la part du public qui exige de l'école qu'elle augmente son niveau de rendement académique.

Travelling north or south on Don Mills Road in the city of North York in Metropolitan Toronto, Canada, one notices an island situated in the middle of this busy thoroughfare. Known as the peanut for its unique shape, this island is home to a church, a community center, a small shopping plaza, a junior high school, and Georges Vanier Secondary School. It is an unusual location for a large, urban secondary school; however, since 1965 Vanier has been attending to the varying needs of its students. If one were to characterize Georges Vanier Secondary School in just one word, that word would have to be *diversity*. On the most obvious level this diversity is reflected in the cultural, racial, and ethnic background, language, age, socioeconomic status, and academic ability of its students.

Of the 1,500 students at the school, one third are adults, most of whom are integrated into the regular program and thus attend classes alongside the adolescent students. In addition, Vanier's enrollment, described as top-heavy or an inverted pyramid, is unusual; the proportion of students in its entry level grade has declined by half in the past five years, and the number of students in the senior grades has doubled. The student population is highly transient, and most of the students do not spend their entire secondary schooling at this one school.

Vanier serves a largely lower-income population although, consistent with its characteristic of diversity, students are drawn from families of varying socioeconomic status.

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The school is surrounded geographically by many low-rent, high-rise apartment buildings in which some students live; other students live west of the school in a higher-income community of single-family dwellings. Many of Vanier's students are attracted to the school from outside the local official catchment area and may come from either subsidized housing developments or middle-income communities. Most students come from families who "may work hard but don't have a lot of luxury or advantage in their lives," one vice-principal noted. A curriculum coordinator at the Board summarized, "It's very hard to define a community for Georges Vanier because it pulls students from so far away. There seems to be no local community base." These realities present challenges to the school's attempts to assess and anticipate academic and other needs and to sustain relevant programs.

It is estimated that at least 80 countries of origin and 50 languages are represented in the school. Of those students born outside Canada, 74% have resided here fewer than six years, and 60% of all students do not have English as their first language. In the context of student life at Vanier, multicultural diversity and awareness are highlighted as one of the school's most positive features, and racial harmony is a significant dimension of the school's overall ethos. Thus the tensions to be addressed in this article do not spring from ethnic divisiveness. Nonetheless, related differences in terms of students' educational background, number of years of uninterrupted schooling, previous learning experiences, and language proficiency do present challenges for those who design and implement program options that seek to identify and respond to specific, but nevertheless diverse, needs. These challenges are fraught with the tensions that are explored throughout this discussion.

The student population was described by many of the 124 teachers and administrators in the school as "difficult" or "hard to serve" in both an academic and a behavioral sense. The principal noted, "Many students who have had failures elsewhere come to Vanier to find success as a last resort in their school career." The school has established a reputation for succeeding with such students in ways that other schools have failed to do. Credit for this success is identified partly with Vanier's numerous program opportunities.

Although Vanier is not known as an academic school, it does offer a strong traditional academic program, and some of its university-bound students have excelled in local, provincial, and national competitions, especially in the sciences and math. For the majority of students, however, success is measured by their ability to acquire adequate employability skills that will enable them to lead independent lives; for others success is achieved by developing basic behavioral and socialization skills. Successful achievement and outcomes are defined ultimately in terms of the practical needs of individual students, and a standardized version of success—most notably in an academic sense—is for the most part absent.

As a composite school Vanier also offers a wide range of technological and vocational programs. In recent years it has devoted greater attention to developing alternative programmatic and service options for those students considered to be at risk of dropping out of school. Increasingly, special programs that focus on social agency through the curriculum are being devised. A belief pervades the school that Vanier can find a place or develop a program for any and every student, and a commitment to such individual attention and "matchmaking" is evident. As one teacher summarized:

> We're a school of disparate parts ... the perception outside from educators is that there are more things happening here than in any other school that I know of. And I would concur with that. There are a lot of funny little people who do funny little things in funny little rooms, and that's how you get students helped.

Different levels of student achievement, although posing obvious challenges for the teaching and administrative staff, can be a driving force behind pedagogical and curricular innovation and efforts to address the needs of all students in a genuine way. At Vanier teachers are encouraged by the school's leadership to identify areas of specific need and to develop alternative means to respond to the social and educational gaps that they encounter. This has resulted in a proliferation of special programs, community-school partnerships, credit course options that adapt traditional subject-based disciplines, cross-curricular integration especially in technological areas, and social service programs that define acquisition of skills largely in terms of socialization and positive behavioral outcomes. Consequently, life at Vanier is typified by a collection of objectives and experiences rather than the reinforcement of a singular vision that is common for all. The school is more like a large heterogeneous city than a homogeneous village community—not simply in its population, but in its focuses, expectations, practices, and outcomes.

In the case of Georges Vanier Secondary School it may be argued that diversity acts as a catalyst for change and innovation that lead ultimately to a greater freedom of choice and opportunity along programmatic lines for both students and teachers. As one preservice teacher working at Vanier noted, "This school has everything anyone could want if students only want to go out and get the most out of school." Many students confirmed that their primary reason for attending Vanier was to take advantage of the diversified curricular options and special programs not offered at other schools. At Vanier a doctrine of choice and personal achievement replaces a doctrine of communal experience and achievement. The fact that diversity functions in such an enabling capacity for teachers, who may initiate program ideas, as well as for students may prove to be more of a strength than a weakness.

The literature has been generally critical of large composite schools that offer, in a seemingly disconnected and individualistic way, a cafeteria-like range of program options such as those available at Vanier. In their study of Ontario's dropout issue, Lawton and Leithwood (1988) noted that "the common alternative to streaming among schools is the operation of comprehensive high schools, institutions that have increasingly come into question because of the need for them to be all things to all people" (p. xi). Similarly, Lee and Smith (1995) claimed that communitarian forms of schools that share tasks and values are preferable to large, comprehensive models of secondary schools. Some argue that these latter types of schools are characterized by "fragmented individualism and balkanization" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991) and represent schools where teachers are isolated, in competition for resources, and divided by philosophical differences.

Diversity does contribute to internal tensions and philosophical rifts that are elusive; it creates and nurtures tensions and divisiveness among teachers and reflects fundamental philosophical disagreements about what their role at Vanier should be, and indeed what the purpose of secondary education in general should be.

Much educational research suggests that effective schools are those where individuals share purposes and values, hold common ideas about schooling, and work harmoniously together (Cobb, 1992; Goodlad, 1984; Hargreaves, 1994; Holmes, 1992; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979; Sergiovanni, 1994). In view of this evidence, some at Vanier are concerned that the internal tensions in their school may adversely affect the many exemplary initiatives and individual achievements that make the school distinct.

Vanier may well represent the school of the future in the Canadian urban context. Remarking on the school's diversity, the Director of Education at the North York Board of Education speculated that Vanier "symbolizes the struggle that we need to go through in order to become a community of Canadians with all the conflict, the quashes,

the aspirations, the personal problems. So, if it can work there, it can work anywhere." Some at Vanier recognize a need to address these tensions that, although being played out at their school, are representative more generally of contemporary educational debates.

It is the purpose of this discussion to focus on the philosophical differences among teachers at Vanier. This introductory section suggests that substantive philosophical differences among staff can exist in successful schools such as Vanier, despite the tendency of the literature to emphasize the necessity of developing shared beliefs and consensual communitarian values. Given internal staff differences, it is difficult to maintain such a model of community at a school such as Vanier. Instead, divergent opinions about schooling have resulted in a kind of individual variation and initiative that have led to an expanded program and greater choice and opportunity for students.

The subsequent sections of this article explore some of the conflicts and tensions as they relate to issues of program, accountability, and, inevitably, the overall purposes of secondary education. They examine some of the major philosophical differences at Vanier and how they are expressed in terms of what the program should offer; they also describe the current external demand for measures of academic accountability, as distinct from a social service orientation, and how it influences the internal debates.

The Tensions Within: The Academic versus the Social Curriculum

> The expanding nature of secondary education has raised additional questions about the relevance of the traditional academic curriculum for all students. The cafeteria curriculum of widened course choices was an attempt to accommodate the more diverse needs of a broader secondary school population, but increased diversity brought with it only chronic incoherence in curricular experience and the decline of any sense of community or common purpose in the bureaucratic, fragmented world that secondary schools had become. (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 58)

At Vanier internal tensions reflect philosophical diversity concerning the role and purpose of education in today's society. They also revolve around the introduction of special programs and relevant staffing concerns. Teachers' comments raise fundamental questions such as: Can schools just concentrate on academic learning at the expense of students' social and emotional well being? Does the focus on social services and student advocacy diminish the school's ability to teach a sound academic program? Can the two sides of schools—the academic and the social service—coexist in peace?

These questions and others relating to the role of the teacher as imparter of knowledge versus facilitator frame many of the tensions that Vanier grapples with as the school tries to accommodate all students. However, is it possible to accommodate all when their needs and demands may in fact conflict? Differences of opinion emerge around the following interrelated dualities: the regular program and the special programs; the academic/technical/vocational focus and the social service focus; equity and excellence; and academic achievement and socialization as learning outcomes.

Tensions among staff at Georges Vanier Secondary School are defined to a large extent along programmatic lines in a context of diversified and expanded options. The lines between the regular program and the special programs are often smudged as both areas address curricular issues. As one vice-principal noted: "We are one of the few schools that recognize that students learn at different rates, and our emphasis is on helping them through the curriculum." Furthermore, to refer to the regular program as a homogeneous entity is misleading because the vast array of academic, technical, and vocational opportunities range from "the highly academic courses to fixing cars to cutting hair to the most advanced computer program of any place around" (teacher).

Nonetheless, the focus of most components of the regular program is on student acquisition of traditional academic knowledge and technical skills.

The special programs at Vanier are also diverse. Some (such as the Learning Center, the Peer Tutoring Program, and the Pathfinder Learning Lab, which designs computer-managed programs for individual students) employ nontraditional means to approach the teaching of academic subjects. Some (such as the Transition and Mentoring Program for entry grade students and the Articulation and Advanced Placement Programs that link the curriculum between secondary schools and community colleges) seek to ease students' transitions into and out of the school. Others (such as the Behavioral Program and some components of the Special Education Program) combine remedial education in basic skills with attention to behavioral disorders. Others (such as the In-School Suspension Program, the Change-Your-Future Program for at-risk visible minority students, and the Successful Beginnings Program that seeks to provide a transition to employment for senior students having few or no course credits) deal almost entirely with life skills development. They include training in conflict resolution, the enhancement of self-esteem, peer mentoring, anger management, career counseling, leadership development, and health and welfare concerns.

Vanier's special programs are distinct from the regular program in a number of ways. They are for the most part not classroom-based in the traditional sense. They all have a low student-teacher ratio, and some provide individualized instruction and/or attention. Those offering course credits have modified and adapted the traditional curriculum and formal subject guidelines. Furthermore, the programs, especially those that concentrate on socialization and the development of life skills, focus primarily on the school's commitment to social agency and provide a social service orientation to "underachieving" students in need of special attention. One vice-principal commented:

> I've seen more social crisis kinds of problems than I thought I would ever see—assault, drug problems, family problems, being thrown out of the house, you name it. The kids' lives are more complicated now. Before, kids with problems just ended up leaving school; now we're working harder to keep them here, but when we do this we also have to help them deal with their problems.

Some of the programs involve specialists such as school psychologists, social workers, a behavioral teacher, a child-youth worker, and a school and community education advisor who may work separately or with Vanier teachers to deliver programs. In discussing some of the special programs, one of the social workers raised an interesting concern about the school that captures the essence of some of the tensions among the staff. She remarked,

> I would hope that they [the school] are doing as much for the kids who can achieve, as for the kids who can't. I see them putting a lot of energy into helping the kids who can't achieve. I don't actually know what they do for the kids who can.

Some teachers believe that academic achievement receives short shrift at Vanier. With reference to the special programs and the attention they receive, an English teacher commented, "Education and book learning are not top priority in this school," and a science teacher explained his perspective:

> Science teachers here don't feel the administration cares much about science. I'm not ashamed of elitism when it's based on hard work, but the philosophy coming from the Board office seems to be to make things equal for all students by eliminating special [academic] programs. You're perceived as elitist now if you

> sponsor activities like stamp clubs that don't involve or attract the full spectrum of students.

Conversely, other teachers expressed a concern about focusing too much on academic achievement. One teacher-counselor noted, "Very few of our students—only about 12%—go on to university, and I would like to see a shift in attitude from catering to university-bound students ... we have to help everybody."

Tensions exist between those teachers more traditionally associated with subject-oriented programs and those who believe that greater priority should be given to programs that address primarily the social and affective needs of students. Ball (1987) noted that such "enormous differences" among teachers "often rest on ideological foundations ... straightforward points of contention over practice can quickly lay bare deep divisions in *teaching ideology*" (p. 14, emphasis in original). He argues that the competing interests of teachers frequently relate practical issues to fundamental political or philosophical positions (Ball, 1987, p. 17), and that "vested interests" connected to teachers' material concerns about working conditions and resources fuel conflict.

The most eloquent way to articulate the tensions at Vanier is by quoting the teachers. The following is a compilation of the perspectives of some who are involved in the school's special programs:

> There's a group of people who are very much committed to their students' success, and then there's always a few who want to go back to 1950 ... There is an annoying ratio of old dinosaurs at Vanier. And it's not age, it's attitude ... In the guise of maintaining an academic standard, they will be so rigid and confrontational ... I think our nontraditional programs are at risk of disappearing or being cut back. We're also at risk of attack by traditional departments who themselves feel frustrated and under the gun ... We represent change, but we also represent to some of them, teachers who aren't doing a teacher's task ... There are people here who would say that all of these initiatives for special needs students and all the people like myself who are assigned to these special programs and have been taken out of the regular classroom have resulted in larger class sizes. They say it's not fair and that we are investing all this time and energy into these losers who are going to drop out anyway.

The resentment that some of these teachers feel for the more "traditional" subject teachers is profound. They see the others as individuals trying to hold back innovation and progress. However, what some may not acknowledge is that the so-called dinosaurs are not simply resisting change in *practice*—they are resisting change in *philosophy*, and this change is not merely an educational issue; it is a social and political challenge to their fundamental beliefs.

In their discussion of program development and implementation, Holmes and Wynne (1989) noted that

> the possibility that teachers may reject the new program because it embodies ideas they have tried unsuccessfully before, because it reflects a philosophy they do not share or because the new program demands an instructional methodology with which they would feel uncomfortable is not given consideration. (p. 187)

They further claim that teachers who resist change are "psychologized" by being told that they are old, conservative, fearful of change, or set in their ways. Some teachers at Vanier who are not supportive of the school's innovative initiatives resent the implication that they are not progressive and dedicated teachers in their own right.

These teachers see the special programs that have been developed to address students' social needs as infringing on their ability to provide quality education to their own students. The following is a compilation of "the other side's" perspectives:

> We're one of the remaining academic subjects left, not like some of the non-academic things we see happening here, like conflict resolution! ... There are a lot of courses offered in this school for credit that are absolutely ridiculous ... We're going a little crazy with these special programs that haven't really been researched. Sometimes the programs don't work as well as some people would like them to or even describe them as working ... Some people do not see some of the more progressive programs we've introduced here as being in the best interests of the kids at large. Also, the teachers in charge of these programs get time off from regular teaching duties to provide leadership in the programs. There's resentment because this is forcing larger class sizes ... We have 30 students in a class, and they have six. Someone has to sacrifice to maintain that ... One of the things they talk about is self-esteem; all these people who cater to the special needs say they want kids to feel good about themselves and then they'll start to learn. It's putting the cart before the horse. The only reason kids ever feel good about themselves in school is because they are learning, and there is no magic way to that.

The tensions and divisions among staff at Vanier center around fundamental differences in opinion about the relative worth of the school's special programs. Given the expanded and diversified range of curricular options, as well as the obvious implications for staffing and resource allocation, such dissension is not surprising. These tensions also reflect philosophical rifts among teachers who view differently the school's apparent and increased priority on programs that focus on socialization, as distinct from academic achievement.

Associated Tensions: The Question of Academic Accountability

Provincially and locally, student success is increasingly defined in terms of academic achievement and outcomes, although student success, as defined by staff at Georges Vanier Secondary School, reflects a diversity of opinions, objectives, and interpretations. Thus internal tensions are complicated further by this growing demand that schools be more accountable for student outcomes in terms of measurable achievement. As Vanier's principal noted, "Accountability is becoming more of a high profile (issue) now in the school and educational system." Recognizing not only the public outcry over standards, but also the declining achievement and skill levels of students, the North York Board of Education is one of the major school boards in Ontario to initiate tighter standardized testing in the schools and to place an emphasis on skills development, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

Many teachers at Vanier are sympathetic. They have raised the alarm over the level of basic skills of the majority of students; the potential failure rate of students in the entry-level grade (grade 10) is a source of significant concern to the teachers and administrators. Some believe that firmer accountability standards might benefit education in Ontario, and they applaud efforts to introduce performance-based assessment.

Others are more wary. They note the inherent dilemmas of the issue. One teacher claimed:

> A school has to adapt to the individual needs of its students. Now the problem with serving individuals and specialties is that the public wants standardization of quality and output and we need to make sure that we keep our standards up, which is difficult when not all students subscribe to the same work ethic or academic style. So there are difficulties there. Success requires us to be adaptable and flexible to meet those needs and yet hold onto our standards.

There are important constraints in Vanier's composition and structure that probably impede its capacity to attain higher ratings on standardized tests. As noted above, many

of Vanier's students have been identified by other schools as problematic academically and behaviorally; Vanier's inclusionary philosophy welcomes students who otherwise would be discouraged by other schools. Also, because such a large proportion of Vanier's students do not have English as a first language, English literacy and communication are obvious challenges. Furthermore, many students come to Vanier from countries torn apart by turmoil. As well as the evident emotional constraints on learning that many refugee students experience, many also have had either major interruptions in their education or no education at all in their countries of origin. In addition, given Vanier's inverted-pyramid enrollment, new senior students remain unknown to many teachers. The transient nature of the student population makes it difficult for Vanier to anticipate students' weaknesses and follow their progress in a traditionally sequential way. As one teacher noted, "If you can't determine the quality of those that enter, you can't determine the quality of those who leave."

These constraints are not offered as apologies for lower rates of academic achievement. Nonetheless, to compare Vanier's students with others by a standardized measure and draw conclusions about the school without considering the major differences and challenges that characterize Vanier is not seen as a satisfactory approach to the evaluation of the school's success or accountability.

The threat of lower academic rates and the increasing demand for accountability exacerbate the tension between seemingly competing views on the purposes of secondary schooling. In this context, schools such as Vanier are seen by some to be concentrating on their role as a social service agency at the possible expense of academic achievement. As one parent noted, "They're really concerned with the kids growing up to be good citizens and being able to be in control of their own lives ... A social service orientation comes to mind because they're much more interested in the students' emotional stability." The school has developed initiatives and programs that, some believe, have little relevance to the goal of raising achievement levels. Thus concern over student achievement has some calling for firmer guidelines: "We would like to see some standards ... not just acceptance of the lowest common denominator" (teacher) in terms of both academics and behavior.

In this vein, Holmes and Wynne (1989) comment:

> It is popular to argue that one of the school's most important functions today is to build students' self-concept. It is not at all clear, however, exactly what function the school either has or ought to have in this area ... there is no evidence that self-concept actually contributes to achievement (p. 21).

Some critical theorists attack such concerns about measurable academic achievement as the "New Right ideology of school reform" (McLaren, 1989, p. 6), and argue that "schooling for self and social empowerment is *ethically prior* to a mastery of technical skills, which are primarily tied to the logic of the marketplace" (McLaren, 1989, p. 162, emphasis in original).

In their support of liberal education, Emberley and Newell (1994) criticize theorists who would separate the imparting of social skills from instruction in basic skills education. They refer to an English teacher who reportedly asked, "What's more important, that we graduate a kid who can read or a kid who can be a good citizen?" (p. 8), and counter with the following question:

> How did we reach a point where a high school English teacher can suggest that somebody could be a good citizen without knowing how to read? It is precisely this kind of attitude, we believe, that endangers education in Canada without promising to make any serious contribution to solving the personal and social problems students are facing. We argue that there can be no essential conflict

> between good education and good citizenship. One cannot exist without the other. Neither good citizenship nor personal fulfillment is possible without a good education. (p. 8)

The substance of these theoretical debates is reflected in the tensions among Vanier staff whose objectives for student success vary. Only one teacher replied without hesitation that success means to her only "academic success and high rates of acceptance at universities." However, others also focused on subject-related achievement and academic mastery as the primary measure of success. One English teacher commented that his goal for student success was "not to turn them into better citizens or so on, but rather to educate them to the best of my ability in my narrow range of the subject ... from the skills some broader knowledge would develop and then perhaps if you were lucky with the knowledge, there would come some kind of wisdom."

In contrast to those defining success in subject-related and academically focused terms, others delineated success in fundamentally nonacademic terms. The following is a compilation of several teachers' responses:

> I think for some students, the educational system would be doing its very best job if the only thing it taught them were social skills and very little else ... Success is partly academic achievement, but that's only part; it's learning to work with people ... I guess I would define a successful school, and this may sound strange, as one where you don't have a visit by your police force every other day. And you don't have to break up a fight and you can go through three or four months without being sworn at and that somewhere along the line you feel that something you have done has gotten through.

Interestingly, some students' responses to questions about what they see as success and what they want out of school imply a similar separation between academics and socialization. Furthermore, they identify achievement in academic rather than interpersonal terms:

> I'm just here to get my 30 credits and move on ... I think teachers have to realize that you're just here for the credits. You're not here to get along well with everyone ... I'm not here to have a relationship with them, I'm here to get my education. That's all they're supposed to do for me. (two students)

Another student highlighted the related tensions associated with the achievement/self-concept duality:

> At another school I wasn't that good at math, and it's just like they said, "Oh, he's doing good, let's push him through." I didn't even know that much ... They're just doing it to make you feel good, and they know you're not doing good, and it makes you feel like you didn't accomplish anything because you didn't really learn something ... I think at the time you're happy to get the credit but then when you go to the next level or next school that doesn't treat you the same way, it's like they're not doing you a favor in the long run, and you look back and wish they didn't do it.

The students quoted here represent some of the students for whom Vanier has developed the special programs that employ alternative means to address achievement and focus largely on social skills. These are the programs that have deepened philosophical rifts between teachers and enhanced internal tensions between those who expect higher academic standards and those who concentrate on students' affective needs and personal development.

It is undoubtedly easier to ascertain the level of a school's success from an academic achievement point of view than it is to gauge the ability of the school to foster successful

social skills and feelings of self-worth on the part of students. In the latter case much of the interpretation of success rests on a degree of faith and confidence. Some teachers at Vanier believe that gains have been made in this respect because of the new programs. However, most recognize that the growing demand for public accountability, as demonstrated by measurable academic indicators, will continue to strain staff relations along philosophical lines and possibly threaten the continuation of some special programs. The associated tension between academic achievement and social agency as the school's primary objective is heightened by another awareness that was expressed by several teachers. These teachers were trying to adapt to their students' diverse academic *and* social needs. As one stated,

> I know our problem today is teaching 100% of the kids, whereas 10 years ago I don't think we needed to teach 50% successfully, nobody really cared, nobody liked the general level students. They paid lip service to them, but now there is a societal need to educate 100% of them.

This reference to societal need squarely situates the tensions at Vanier in the larger context of defining the purposes of secondary education in contemporary Canada.

Unresolved Tensions: Defining the Purposes of Secondary Education

Teachers and administrators at Vanier expressed a uniform need to regard a school's success in terms of its role in preparing students for their future as citizens of a democracy. How that role should be approached and what policies and programs should be developed to fulfill it, however, are central points of disagreement. This disagreement highlights the divergent and often competing perspectives on what are and should be the overall purposes of secondary education, especially in diverse environments with students of widely differing needs and achievement levels.

Many at Vanier argue that a school's success ultimately depends on its ability to make students feel happy, secure, and positive about their learning. They stress the affective conditions connected to self-esteem and social development. Others maintain that self-esteem without academic competence is misleading to students, and that higher rates of achievement are the key to success. The philosophical and pedagogical tug-of-war between those two positions is largely a matter of emphasis and priority rather than a rejection of one goal or the other. One of the central conclusions of the Exemplary Schools Project maintains that both goals—the academic and the social—are inextricably linked:

> Any approach to school policy must recognize that the social and the academic aspects are tightly intertwined. To ignore the moral and social parts of schooling and to call for a stronger focus on knowledge, test scores, and provincial examination results is to disregard the consensus that emerges from the schools in this study: that students need to learn a lot more than traditional academics. (Gaskell, 1995, p. 86)

However, students also need to learn a lot more than socialization skills. Thus, even in our efforts to view the two purposes as interdependent functions of schooling, we continue to address them separately.

Any attempt to give priority to one purpose over the other inevitably maintains the academic outcomes-social agency split. This split and all its inherent tensions are lived in practice at schools such as Vanier in terms of program, policy, and philosophy. They are similarly sustained in theory. Some critics argue that education should not be used primarily "as a technique in the service of social reconstruction" (Emberley & Newell, 1994, p. 4); many maintain that the "inculcation in the disciplines of knowledge forms the traditional core task and goal of the secondary school" (Holmes & Wynne, 1989, p.

19). Other critics champion the social objective of "empowering students" (McLaren, 1989) and attending to their emotional and developmental needs.

The comments of one of Vanier's former principals support this latter objective:

> In the end, they'll judge us by how many kids pass and how many kids fail. But I think there's an underestimation of how valuable it is to work in the affective domain. We have literally scores of kids here who cannot come to the learning table because they cannot deal with the daily rigors of life. They have not overcome their anger sufficiently well that they can even sit in those classrooms and see how what we're doing is even remotely relevant to what they're doing. And until we deal with that affective domain, those kids aren't going to do well ... And I see them [Board] coming in with their standardized testing, and they're going to start judging schools based on "critical scores" ... And the money is going to go to schools where the high marks are, and then the kids with high marks will follow the money ... and you have a ghettoized system. It's going to hurt kids in the long run because schools with a whole bunch of disadvantaged kids, like Vanier, aren't going to get the resources.

However, others maintain that in trying to accommodate all needs schools spread themselves too thin in a way that sacrifices the real purpose of schooling—academic mastery. From this perspective, academic mastery is not merely a valued institutional outcome, but rather a crucial acquisition for students who must live independent lives in a competitive society. Thus instilling in students a sense of self-esteem and emotional security is a vacuous exercise if in the process schools diminish such areas as literacy and numeracy. A school board superintendent addressed this point and tied it closely to the issue of equity in education:

> One of the strengths of Vanier is that they serve a particularly difficult group of kids, and they do so in some ways very well. But, ultimately, I think it's an equity issue. If these students are really going to be able to compete successfully with students from more typically middle class schools, then they have to have the same academic skills as well. They can go away from here being free of racial bias, having lots of insights into the nature of their own personal growth and development and so on. But, if they can't read and write and do arithmetic in order to compete with the other kids at university, they're going to lose out. I think we have to attend to their social needs, but we also have to do a better job of convincing them that we have to achieve higher academic standards for their own interests in the long run.

Several other respondents referred to the importance of equity in education. However, its fluid definition continues to fuel debate over the role and responsibilities of schools regarding its attainment. If equity is interpreted to mean the equality of educational opportunities, then Vanier is successful in its attempts to provide programmatic access to all its students. If equity is interpreted to mean the equality of educational outcomes and the "ensuring of success for all of our students" (trustee), then there are noticeable gaps. In either case, there exists an ongoing tension between equity and the achievement of excellence. One vice-principal commented on this duality:

> At Vanier, we are not just trying to balance excellence and equity but we are trying to achieve both. It is a belief and an operating principle of the North York Board of Education that excellence and equity go hand-in-hand. We must establish high expectations of outcomes of all our learners and then help each one of them to achieve. Since each learner is different, it is expected that schools in North York will provide the expanded opportunities required to ensure equity of outcome for all. It is the belief in this philosophy as well as the belief that all

students can learn that has resulted in the development of the special programs at Vanier.

This mandate, accompanied by the urgency to raise students' achievement levels, probably will continue to pose significant challenges to the administrators and teachers at Vanier. And such challenges will probably continue to exacerbate the philosophical and practical tensions and divisions among its staff.

One of the problems with writing about the internal tensions at Vanier is that the discussion may skew one's impression of the school and obscure its many exemplary qualities, which are described elsewhere (Campbell, 1995). What this article does not address or describe, among other characteristics, is the extraordinary dedication of Vanier's educators; the multiple curricular opportunities available, many of which provide innovative links with community services, businesses, colleges, and universities; the most expansive and advanced telecommunications and computer programs in the district, and possibly in the province; an impressive account of academic and nonacademic awards won by Vanier students and teachers; the school's pervasive tone of mutual respect, order, and tolerance of differences; the individual accounts of those students who stay in school despite enormous personal and academic pressures that might compel them to drop out; and the many adult students who see Vanier as their second chance at having a new life and a hopeful future. These realities exist at Vanier too. A discussion of the school's rifts and challenges, tensions and divisions should not diminish an appreciation of Vanier's efforts and accomplishments.

In sum, Vanier is a school that is characterized by diversity at many levels. Elements of diversity in student population, program development, and philosophical belief are fundamentally interconnected. Vanier embraces diversity and seeks to include, anticipate, encourage, accommodate, and respond to its students' varying needs. This has led to an expanded program and greater choice and opportunity for students and teachers that—contrary to negative references in the literature to fragmentation, isolation, and competition—may be viewed positively as one of the school's strengths. It is the diversified curriculum and attention to individual needs that attract many students to Vanier.

Nevertheless, and as a result, teachers at Vanier experience tensions that spring from differences in belief and practice. Such tensions focus on the relative value of curricular components, the academic and the social service emphases of the various programs, the call for increased accountability in terms of measurable academic achievement as distinct from indicators of positive socialization outcomes, and the equity-excellence duality. The tensions discussed here may not be resolvable. Nonetheless, consideration of the challenges, dilemmas, and tensions contributes to an ongoing examination of what the role, purposes, and responsibilities of secondary education are, not simply in the context of Georges Vanier Secondary School, but in schools elsewhere that are grappling with similar realities.

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Dilemmas of Difference: Van Tech's Schools-within-a-School Model

Vancouver Technical Secondary School is a large, inner-city comprehensive school serving an ethnically and linguistically diverse clientele. Van Tech has responded to students' diverse needs by implementing a schools-within-a-school model. To ignore the many differences among its students would certainly contribute to Van Tech's dropout rate. But in attending to needs through mini-schools, the school risks highlighting and stigmatizing various groups' perceived differences. This dilemma of difference plays out in a number of ways, depending on which type of mini-school—elite, dropout prevention, vocational, or cultural—is under scrutiny. The more a mini-school attempts to deviate from prevailing norms and the competitive academic curriculum, the more it risks being devalued. Taken as a whole the various schools-within-a-school provide lessons both about reforming large schools to make them more engaging for students and teachers alike and about de facto streaming of students.

Située dans un centre défavorisé de la ville, l'école secondaire Vancouver Technical Secondary School est une grande école compréhensive qui déssert une clientèle ethniquement et linguistiquement diverse. "Van Tech" a répondu aux divers besoins des étudiants et des étudiantes en implantant un modèle de plusieurs écoles plus petites à l'intérieur même de la plus grande école. Si on ignorait tout ce qui différencie la population estudiantine on contribuerait surement au taux de décrochage de Van Tech. Mais en essayant de répondre aux besoins éducatifs et sociaux dans le cadre de mini-écoles, l'école même risque de signaler et même de stigmatiser les différences perçues des groupes divers appartenants aux mini-écoles. Ce dilemme de différences qui se manifeste de plusieurs façons dépendant de la nature de la mini-école—élite, de préventation du décrochage, de formation professionnelle, vocationelle, ou culturelle est examiné de près. Plus une de ces mini-écoles tente de dévier des normes dominantes et du curriculum académique compétitif, plus cette même mini-école risque d'être dévalorisée. Pris dans son ensemble, la notion de mini-écoles nichés à l'intérieure d'une plus grande école sert à apprendre certaines leçons en ce qui a trait à réformer les grandes écoles pour les rendre plus acceuillantes et engageantes pour les étudiants, les étudiantes, et les professeur(e)s et concernant aussi le regroupement des jeunes dans divers programmes.

Large high schools can be alienating places for students, particularly younger ones, who may find it difficult to connect with their teachers and peers and to learn well (Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993). Lee and Smith (1995) found that smaller high school size was associated with student gains in achievement and engagement and a more equitable distribution of these gains.

One strategy for achieving smaller size is to break up larger schools into schools-within-a-school (SWS). Participants in each SWS engage in teaching and learning together for at least half of the school day in a distinct location. The main school, within certain district and provincial guidelines, gives SWS teachers the autonomy to alter the timetable, select students, create or refashion curriculum, and establish codes of student

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behavior. Schools-within-a-school typically have distinct names and purposes; they aim to serve particular groups or emphasize different themes, for example, remedial, enrichment, occupational, and performing arts.

The SWS model enables such desirable practices as increasing collegiality among teachers and personalizing student-teacher and peer relations. There is a continuing struggle, however, with differentiation of the high school population into higher and lower streams, groups of "fast" and "slow" learners. A tension exists between serving presumably diverse student needs and interests and providing equal access to learning opportunities.

This tension is manifested in the competition for resources and status that inevitably occurs among the mini-schools, and more stigma attaches to any mini-school[1] that seems to deviate from the competitive academic curriculum. By competitive academic curriculum, I mean the university preparatory courses in language, mathematics, social studies, and science, which derive their high status from their links to the society's wider system of rewards.

Because mini-schools tend to tailor their offerings to distinct student needs or interests, they inevitably confront the *dilemma of difference*. Minow (1990) poses the dilemma of difference thus: "when does treating people differently emphasize their differences and stigmatize or hinder them on that basis? and when does treating people the same become insensitive to their difference and likely to stigmatize or hinder them on *that* basis?" (p. 20, italics in original). The dilemma of difference proliferates in any postmodern organization where there exists "a diverse array of voices speaking from quite different, often contradictory perspectives and value commitments" (Donmoyer, 1996, p. 19).

The dilemma of difference manifests itself, therefore, in any school with special programs, but it is particularly vivid in mini-schools because of their distinct identity in, and relation to, the whole school.[2] Four major ways that the dilemma of difference often reveals itself in the current reform movement to create SWS programs are the elite program dilemma, the dropout prevention program dilemma, the vocational program dilemma, and the cultural program dilemma.

Elite program dilemma. When an elite program providing an enriched curriculum starts up, the participating parents, students, and teachers are generally pleased, but the concern inevitably arises that other classes are deprived of some of the school's most engaged, academic students. Further, research on streaming has demonstrated that low-income and certain ethnic minority students are often placed in the lowest streams, even when they have equal or higher test scores or marks (Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller, 1992; Oakes, 1985; Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1991). Yet when schools attempt to destream, they face concerted resistance from elite parents (Wells & Serna, 1996). Thus the school as a whole must navigate between providing an equal education to all and holding on to students with supposed exceptional talents or abilities and challenging them.

Dropout prevention program dilemma. Dropout prevention programs aim to provide safety nets that are geared to meet the intellectual and social needs of students whom the conventional school cannot or will not help. Yet safety nets can become safety valves that enable school administrators to keep mainstream programs relatively free from so-called troublemakers and rebels (Kelly, 1993). Programs that commonly segregate the most disaffected leave intact the institutional arrangements that contribute to the alienation of a good many other students and school staff as well. Located on the margins of conventional schools, dropout prevention programs typically have more freedom to innovate but often at the risk of being devalued.

Vocational program dilemma. The vocational mission of high schools that emphasize the academic core often remains hidden. Schools frequently fail to help students connect

what they are learning to their future work possibilities, yet most students accept on faith the assertion that they need school in order to obtain jobs. In the name of "relevance" some high schools have offered job training that many now realize closed students' occupational choices prematurely (Grubb & Lazerson, 1976). Today, reformers concerned with the vocational purpose of high schools emphasize the need to integrate vocational and academic education and to attend simultaneously to both intellectual and practical competencies (Grubb, 1992). Yet as long as the academic and not vocational curriculum continues to provide entry to higher education, the professions, and other material and social rewards, it seems likely that even an "enlightened" vocational program will be seen as second rate.

Cultural program dilemma. Cultural programs can provide enclaves where students draw support from people who share similar histories, cultures, and languages. Yet they can become stigmatized as ghettos unless they also prepare students to succeed in the dominant culture. Crucial to understanding this dilemma is the unstated assumption that white, Anglo-Canadians do not have culture. "They occupy unmarked, supposedly empty categories that nevertheless define the standard against which everyone else is compared and inevitably judged different" (Irvine, 1995, p. 31).

Despite the Canadian ideal of an equitable multiculturalism, the reality is that different cultures and languages carry more or less status in the dominant society. In many anglophone communities, the study of French, one of Canada's two official languages, is widely seen to enrich the academic core (including the study of English) as well as to enhance students' future job prospects. For these reasons one would not expect a French Immersion program to suffer from the same stigmas as a mini-school featuring, for example, the cultures and languages of First Nations peoples or recent immigrant groups. The latter groups must battle negative stereotypes in the wider society as well as structural problems grounded in economic and social inequalities (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

These four program dilemmas illustrate overlapping, as well as distinct issues. Elite programs that enrich the academic core present a mirror image of the dilemmas faced by dropout prevention programs that offer a remedial curriculum. Vocational and cultural programs are not overtly ranked in terms of the competitive academic curriculum, but covertly they are.

I was able to observe how these four manifestations of the dilemma of difference played out in a large, inner-city comprehensive high school, which had begun to implement a schools-within-a-school model. In this article I analyze the dilemmas of difference, drawing on Vancouver Technical Secondary School's mini-schools as illustrations. I review Van Tech's most important responses to these tensions, as well as the benefits and costs of the current SWS strategy. Finally, I discuss some of the policy implications of creating schools-within-a-school in light of the dominance of traditional academic subjects and societal pressures to stream students.

The Research Setting

Vancouver Technical Secondary School has pursued the SWS strategy in an effort to break up what some insiders have nicknamed the "Great Big School." Tech serves over 1,700 students in a mainly low-income and culturally varied neighborhood.[3] The school is challenged by increasing diversity, demands for change, and competition for its top academic achievers from schools in more affluent neighborhoods.

At the close of the 1980s, Tech had many strengths, but its exam scores were at or near the bottom of those in the district. The school had a reputation as nonuniversity stream, undemanding, unsafe, and out of step with the changing economy. Under pressure from new immigrant groups and higher-income families settling in the neighborhood, some painful decisions were made to close the foundry, welding, and similar vocational programs and to place a new emphasis on academic achievement.

Today Tech is a school in the process of turning itself around. Provincial exam scores in a number of key academic subjects have steadily increased since 1985-1986, as have participation rates. During the same period, withdrawal rates in all grades have decreased—in grade 8, for example, from 14.6% to 2.2%. When interviewed, parents, students, and staff alike said that Van Tech's success derives from meeting the diverse (social, emotional, and academic) needs of students through schools-within-a-school and other special programs.

To ignore the many differences among its students would certainly contribute to Van Tech's dropout rate. But by attending to needs and interests through mini-schools, the school risks highlighting and stigmatizing groups' perceived differences. In our investigation of successful practices at Van Tech, we found the various mini-schools offered an excellent lens through which to study how the dilemma of difference manifests itself. In addition, we found staff members who were largely mindful of such enduring tensions and trying to make structural adjustments to mitigate them.

In designing most of the mini-schools, for example, administrators and teachers wanted students to interact with fewer peers and teachers to work in small teams, but integration with a larger group was also important. Thus students in most mini-schools attend them for four core courses, from grades 8 to 10; they are integrated with other students in elective courses and in grades 11 and 12. This model aims to balance the benefits of smaller, personalized environments with the opportunity to form friendships outside the mini-schools. Further, to make teachers in the schools-within-a-school conscious of the overall community, most teach inside and outside their mini-school, and administrators attempt to distribute resources and time fairly across the entire school. The hope is that teachers and students will spread the enthusiasm engendered in the mini-schools throughout Van Tech.

The Research Process

Between the beginning of October 1993 and the end of April 1994, the research team (three doctoral students and I) observed 75 classes (at every grade level and across all subjects and mini-schools) and a wide variety of meetings related to the day-to-day operation of the school, as well as to accreditation. We shadowed 13 students through their school day, sitting with them during their classes and at lunch. We interviewed 12 school and district administrators, 2 former school board trustees, 13 community representatives, 12 parents, 30 teachers, 5 counsellors, 7 other staff members, and 26 students. Other teachers and students were interviewed in groups. We also analyzed pertinent school, district, and provincial documents and statistics. We later solicited comments on an early draft of the report from 32 teachers during four focus group interviews. Students from eight English-as-a-second-language (ESL) and English classes provided us with written responses to various sections of the draft report. (For further discussion of methodology, see Kelly, 1995.)

When starting and developing schools-within-a-school, there are inevitably problems, tensions, pitfalls, and detours. A staff involved in the process might easily become defensive and closed. Our Exemplary Schools Project team, on the scene for hundreds of hours, usually felt welcomed, even when we appeared unannounced in classes or at meetings where teachers were frankly discussing challenges arising as programs evolved. What makes this article and its focus on the dilemmas engendered by the SWS model possible, then, is the degree of openness we found among the Tech staff. This quality contributes in no small part to the school's turnaround success.

Elite Program Dilemma

Tech had been losing top students to higher-income schools on the west side of Vancouver, where for many years all districtwide enrichment programs were located. So in 1991 Van Tech administrators initiated two flagship mini-schools, Summit (for the

gifted) and Flexible Studies or "Flex" (for highly motivated learners). They also started the sole French immersion secondary program on the working-class east side. Because a disproportionate number of French immersion students are, like Summit and Flex students, eligible for honors or advanced placement classes when they reach grades 11 and 12, Van Tech staff members often categorize the French immersion program as elite.[4]

Summit, for example, addresses the needs of what staff often referred to as "higher end students." The students, who have been identified as gifted in at least one academic area, apply from elementary schools that feed into Van Tech, and they are selected on the basis of teacher, counselor, and parent recommendations, as well as written applications. Teachers describe the Summit curriculum as enriched, meaning "more creative problem-solving, more challenges than in regular classes." Students are actively involved in shaping what and how they learn: they work at their own pace, and teachers encourage them to make their own choices and decisions regarding topics, assignments, and test schedules. Social development is fostered through extracurricular activities. For example, students organize car washes, food sales, and the like to raise funds for various school, community, and international projects. Summit students saw these experiences as promoting leadership, responsibility, and a cooperative work spirit. They described the Summit curriculum as fun, interesting, and challenging.

The danger, as perceived by some Van Tech staff, is that elite programs like Summit skim off many of the top academic students. As one mini-school teacher confided:

> We see that it's really not fair that we have these classes of really great kids that are a lot of fun to work with, they're really positive, and we don't have discipline problems in the class. And then everyone else suffers, including ourselves, in the other classes 'cause those kids have been brought out of that pool.

Partly to counter charges of elitism, mini-school teachers teach in the SWS only part time; the rest of the time they teach regular classes. And after a few years of experimenting with the timetable, administrators in 1994-1995 began to schedule the elite programs' academic core courses at different times to ensure that Flex, Summit, and French immersion students mixed with a broader range of students for half the day.

Still, these elite programs represent the top rung in the hierarchy of course offerings. Although the relevant data were unavailable at Van Tech, research elsewhere has tended to show that the "children of working-class, ethnic/racial-minority and single-parent families end up in the lower streams in highly disproportionate numbers" (Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller, 1992, p. 53). Further, the evidence to date shows that although students in high-ability streams learn more and at a faster pace than do those in lower streams, streaming provides no advantage over mixed-ability grouping with respect to the achievement of students in the middle-ability range (Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1991).

Some of our Van Tech interviewees, including parents of top academic students, feared that mixing students of different abilities in the same classroom would lower curriculum standards and hinder the academic progress of higher and lower ability students alike. Others disagreed; they believed that streaming effectively cuts off many students' chances for a university education and teaches elite program students the wrong values. Students, argued one teacher, "have to work with all kinds of people, whether they are their intellectual equal or not." And "these super-bright and super-motivated youngsters" cannot learn "compassion ... in an elitist little group that segments itself off from the rest of society." Partly in response to such concerns, Flex teachers do not select students based solely on high academic ability or achievement. After the first year, at least 10% of the students chosen for the Flex program have entered with average or below average marks.

The elite programs at Van Tech, despite efforts at partial democratization, represent a clear-cut form of streaming. Research has shown that streaming contributes to unequal learning opportunities and academic outcomes, yet at Van Tech and elsewhere this practice has resisted elimination.

Dropout Prevention (or Alternative)[5] *Program Dilemma*

The alternative programs at Van Tech (Nova, Sunrise, Spectrum) strive to provide caring environments for students who have not for a variety of reasons succeeded in traditional classrooms. All provide students with greater personal attention by lowering the student-to-staff ratio. Teachers sometimes feel they are more successful at improving their students' self-esteem and ability to get along with others than they are at engaging them academically. These programs provide a safety valve for the main school and a safety net for the students. However, teachers' efforts to foster pride in the alternative programs as "cool schools" may inadvertently highlight their distance from the mainstream program.

Spectrum, Van Tech's senior secondary alternative program, illustrates the safety net-safety valve tension. Staff reject the label of "rehabilitation" program, although the district and the BC Ministry of Social Services classify the program this way for funding purposes. The term falsely implies that students are "broken and need to be fixed," according to one teacher, and that the primary goal is for students to reenter the main school. Instead, the Spectrum staff members say that their primary goal is to provide a true alternative to the large, traditional secondary school.

Spectrum has created standards of behavior consistent with the widespread belief at Van Tech that students who are considered at risk of dropping out or being pushed out often thrive in more structured programs. All teachers give morning quizzes, for instance, which constitute up to 10% of a student's final grade. This policy was put into practice to encourage punctuality and attendance among students, "the vast majority" of whom had "attendance and late problems in the regular system," according to teachers. As these quiz questions provide reviews for upcoming tests, they serve a pedagogical aim too.

Despite the structure, Spectrum has an informal atmosphere. Students call teachers by their first names. Students feel less pressure to dress up or to keep pace with the latest fashion trends, which many (particularly those living on their own) cannot afford. Smaller program and class sizes make this relaxed atmosphere possible. Furthermore, because many of their students have rejected the traditional teacher-student relationship, staff in the alternative program have had to rethink the nature of teachers' authority. This is less possible in the regular program, where teachers face many students in a day.

Students in dropout prevention programs have typically been offered a remedial curriculum, which can stigmatize the programs as second-class. It then becomes difficult for students enrolled in a devalued program—one that seems to mark them as "dummies"—to turn around academically. Staff at Spectrum recognized this and have sought to destream their curriculum; a few years ago they added Algebra 11 and Spanish 11 to Spectrum's offerings to allow students to meet university and college entrance requirements. This emphasis has allowed teachers to communicate higher expectations and provide students with opportunities to go on to postsecondary educational institutions, as well as to be with a wider range of peers. A former staff member recalled that during Spectrum's first few years, "it was very loose":

> The idea was, "Let's individualize everything, and students will work at their own rate, and we'll throw out all of the regular curriculum, and we'll make stuff up that the kids are interested in." ... What we found was that students didn't take it seriously.... They didn't attend, and when they were there, they said ...

> "Friends tell me I'm a dummy 'cause I'm not coming to a real school, and the marks you give me don't mean anything."

In response, the staff moved to provide more structure and higher expectations, and students responded positively. They were able to tell their friends that the curriculum, marking standards, and grade 12 exams were the same at Spectrum as at the main school.

The more Spectrum aligns itself with the competitive academic curriculum, the more it challenges the stigma of being a lower stream. At the same time, though, it risks replicating some of the mainstream schooling practices that had alienated many of Spectrum's intended clientele. Some teachers and counselors working with alternative program students in grades 8, 9, and 10 have expressed concern that Spectrum usually requires incoming students to have a grade 10 completion certificate and asks those who are not attending regularly and making academic progress to leave. This, they maintain, then creates a need for safety nets elsewhere in the educational system.

Vocational Program Dilemma

Van Tech has a flourishing career preparation program with 15 options ranging from financial accounting to computer science and sport and recreation careers. The hairdressing program, for example, attracts students from across the district. They take hairdressing for three of eight classes in grade 11, four of eight classes in grade 12, and 500 hours postgrade 12. Van Tech offers full salon services, so students work on paying customers; approximately 90% of the clients come from outside the school itself. A three-week work experience component places students in salons outside the school and demonstrates to students what employers will expect of them. The program uses the latest technology and strives to stay ahead of the curve. The head teacher raises funds, hires her own substitute teachers, stocks the salon with products, and does its bookkeeping. "I do all the administrative things myself," she said. "We basically run our own school here within the school."

Proponents of vocational education must battle the popular belief that preparation for university provides the only route to success and that postsecondary technical education is for those who are not intelligent enough to qualify for university. Fueling this belief, students with low attendance, low marks, or both often find their way to vocational courses and programs. Sometimes these programs do provide the hook to keep them in school. Even so, vocational teachers do not want their courses to become dumping grounds for students with learning disabilities or discipline problems.

Applicants for the hairdressing career prep program, for example, are screened. Our research team interviewed a young woman who had not been accepted due to a record of poor attendance and low marks. Once in the program, the hairdressing teachers insist that their students attend all of their other classes. Because the hairdressing program provides a lot of "perks," students are motivated not to lose the privilege. Explained one teacher,

> I don't want this to be a hangout for them. This is not an alternative; this is part of the high school program.... The focus is that our students graduate with a grade 12 certification, and the only way they can do that is by attending their other courses.

If they can pass the exam for their hairdressing license, students do not need a grade 12 certificate. Yet the teachers feel strongly that Van Tech's program is a "complete package" and "that if students don't pass their other courses, they won't pass their hairdressing either." They emphasize the importance of a high school diploma:

> Further on down the line, especially in this day and age, people change careers. Chances are they're not always going to stay with hairdressing. That's what

statistics show us.... I tell them, too, that they'll be able to say they've completed something.

Although teachers work hard to prevent their program from becoming a safety valve, they put equal effort into creating a safety net. Many hairdressing students are considered at risk of dropping out, and some are "fringe gang members," according to one teacher. They need "a lot of encouragement" and "self-esteem building." Teachers must, at the same time, hold high expectations. "We show them [by exposing them to real work situations] that mediocrity won't allow them to survive in the real world."

Many students are reluctant to choose careers in more practical fields, despite limited English proficiency and a lack of preparedness for university. In response Van Tech has focused on fields where on graduation quality job opportunities are relatively plentiful. For example, in 1994, 90% of recent graduates were working as hairdressers, half of those in top salons.

An internal competition of visions has arisen out of the SWS structure at Van Tech. The split in imaginations about Tech's mission is exemplified in a debate over whether to change the school's name to Vancouver High School or Vancouver Academic and Technical High School. And no matter how rigorous career preparation courses are or how well they help students make the transition to work or postsecondary technical education, the school will no doubt continue to struggle against a societal devaluing of nonwhite-collar careers.

Cultural Program Dilemma

Tumanos (which means "guardian spirit" in Coast Salish) illustrates how the cultural program dilemma operates. Organized as a mini-school, Tumanos offers an academic program for First Nations students. It emphasizes the art, literature, history, sport, and spiritual ceremonies of Canada's Aboriginal peoples. The focus on Native cultures is the hook to keep students in school as well as an important vehicle for teaching academic subjects.

In setting up the program, staff sought to "balance the real city world here for a teenager with all of its temptations" with "a sense of pride and culture." Tumanos staff help students to "find their identity," according to a counselor. "A lot of them don't ... know who they are. They are labeled as a Native person, but they don't know what that means; it was wiped out." "Knowing who you are and understanding something about your background," added a teacher, form the basis for increasing students' self-esteem. Learning a critical history of their people provides a form of protection against the effects of the destructive stereotypes that many First Nations youths must endure.

This philosophy seems to be bearing fruit. Teachers have reported improved student behavior and attitudes, a reduced dropout rate, and an increase in cultural pride. We observed the use of traditional practices to encourage the development of student leadership. For example, Tumanos students elect a chief, a clan mother, and five peace elders. Together these seven students conduct the Talking Circles and take an active part in maintaining discipline among students. Students explored First Nations history while learning to carve a totem pole.

For all its success, Tumanos still grapples with the dilemma of difference. Partly as a result of its cultural healing focus, and despite its aim to serve as a university preparatory program, Tumanos has to struggle against the label *nonacademic*. Although the Tumanos program does not have "rehabilitation" as its goal (as do the dropout prevention programs), in reality the First Nations students who enroll tend to be behind academically. They are coping with multiple problems that affect their ability to concentrate on schoolwork. First Nations students who are doing well at the grade 7 level, according to one administrator, tend to enter the regular grade 8 program at Van Tech, which means that students who require extra attention are directed to Tumanos. Staff

and students said in interviews, though, that the program does not function as a lower stream. Insisted one student, "A lot of the other Native programs are alternate. Tumanos is academic. We do the same work as the people in the regular program. We just have a smaller class, and we have a lot of support."

Yet there is some evidence to suggest that staff members outside of Tumanos have treated Tumanos students as belonging to a lower stream and have resisted their partial integration into the mainstream. According to one staff member:

> My experience with Tumanos last year—I hate to say it—a lot of teachers simply didn't want those kids in their classes, even if they were doing relatively well and if they were nice kids.... We had enormous problems with integrating [Tumanos students] into things like PE.... Even the basic idea of providing the same consequences for those kids as they would for others. If Native kids came late, without a gym strip, for example. Other kids were made to go collect garbage, keep score. Tumanos kids were either sent back or left to just hang about. So I think some of the teachers really feel like those programs [like Tumanos] are there for those kids, and that's where those kids should be.

The Tumanos staff has rejected enforcing standards that would exclude academic underachievers, because they believe that they can mitigate previous barriers such as underpreparation or institutionalized racism. Having accepted students into Tumanos, the staff want to prepare them for academic success in the wider world, so they provide extra tutoring if necessary. Eventually, however, students must succeed in the regular program in order to graduate from high school and, ideally, enter university.[6]

Coping Constructively with the Dilemmas

Each of the four manifestations of the dilemma of difference—in elite, dropout prevention, vocational, and cultural programs—can be traced to how a particular mini-school relates to mainstream expectations for students, as embodied in provincial exams and university entrance requirements. The more a mini-school deviates from prevailing norms (e.g., regarding dress, attendance, behavior) and the standard curriculum and attempts to tailor itself to a particular set of student needs, the more it risks being devalued. Recognizing differences among students carries risks, as does ignoring differences. As one risk is mitigated, other dangers surface. Staff members are continually faced with tensions and predicaments that defy easy or ultimately satisfactory solutions.

Participants in the mini-schools emphasized such benefits as increased teacher collaboration, more personalized learning, and enhanced feelings of community. There is little doubt that these smaller communities within Tech provide positive experiences for the students, parents, and teachers directly involved. However, some parents, staff, and community members have voiced concern that these experiences are available only to a select group of students.

> Public school is what makes community possible. And if you create a secondary school in which kids are hived off into these atomistic, independent or semi-independent programs or streams of sorts, then you erode the capacity of the school to promote community. That is, the public school is the only institution where kids come together in conversation about issues.... If you don't learn it there, you are not going to learn it anywhere else. (former Vancouver School Board trustee)

The tension about mini-schools—particularly those perceived as "elite"—providing "extra" or "enriched" learning experiences that are not accessible to the regular school population is partially offset at Tech by the provision of schoolwide courses, activities, and clubs open to all students.

Concern over differential treatment also provided the impetus for the creation of core grouping across the entire grade 8. Under this system, all grade 8 students are

formed into groups of 24. Each group takes classes from fewer than the usual number of teachers because a single teacher instructs the group in both English and social studies, while another teaches both math and science. The twinned subjects are usually taught in a single two-hour block. Core 8 enthusiasts cited benefits including better teacher-student bonding, a mini-school experience for every student, and more flexibility and variety in teaching approaches over the longer class period.

Another way that Van Tech is coping with the dilemma of difference is through the creation of a new curriculum—applied academics—that attempts to bridge the vocational-academic divide. The technical studies department, for example, developed an applied physics course to fold into the science curriculum. Piloted in 1994-1995 with provincial funding, the course provides students with Physics 11 theory so they can go into Physics 12, but they also receive practical, hands-on training. The goal of applied academics courses is to integrate vocational and academic content and thereby increase the relevance of school curricula for all students (BC Ministry of Education, 1995).

To some extent these measures have mitigated feelings of exclusion. Although some mini-school participants do have identities separate from Van Tech—for example, they refer to Van Tech as the main school or the Great Big School—when students from the various schools-within-a-school were asked if they identified most with the program that they were in or with Van Tech generally, they commonly replied either "Van Tech" or "both." The very question tended to baffle students, because it suggested that the two identities were mutually exclusive. Students in the Sunrise, Spectrum, and Tumanos programs may be an exception to this. In all three of these programs, students are on a different timetable from the rest of the school; they also draw students from outside the catchment area; and Sunrise and Spectrum are located in portables away from the main complex. As well, these programs attract students who have not always been successful in larger schools.

Despite the humanizing efforts at Van Tech, there is still stratification between students who are academically oriented and those who are not, between the "gifted" and the "at risk." Some teachers still seem disinclined to work with "problem" students and tend either to exacerbate student alienation through insensitive demands or refer them to dropout prevention programs, which are physically and temporally separated from the rest of Van Tech.

Conclusion

Given the benefits of SWS, would it be possible to devise a model that avoided streaming? In theory, yes. The school could be divided completely into equally funded mini-schools, and students could be assigned to them by lottery to ensure equality of access. The mini-schools could exist as structural alternatives only, organized so that students interacted with fewer peers and teachers for core courses. A more complicated model would allow the mini-schools to emphasize different themes.

Allowing themes would introduce some curricular differentiation and with it the possibility of restreaming. Administrators and teachers would need mechanisms for determining the complex needs and interests of parents and students in the neighborhood and the appeal of potential themes. Once themes were arrived at, school officials would need to establish implementation guidelines. For example, any occupational mini-schools would have to be designed around a sufficiently broad cluster of occupations to serve a varied student body. "A health area might include both would-be doctors and practical nurses; an industrial technologies career path might include both future engineers, welders, and auto mechanics" (Grubb, 1992, p. 41). And school staff, in consultation with the community, would need to agree on outcomes; for example, students across all mini-schools would need to master a certain common curriculum, or graduation rates would have to be comparable across the various schools-within-a-school.

School officials would have to exercise vigilance so that inequities did not enter the system over time. One could imagine, for example, that a disproportionate number of middle-class parents might sign their children up for the lottery to get into a fine arts mini-school, whereas working-class parents might be more likely to favor an occupational mini-school. The students in the arts mini-school then might find fundraising for supplementary activities easier than in other mini-schools. Or guidance counselors might subtly and with the best of intentions encourage a disproportionate number of ESL students to sign up for a multicultural mini-school lottery.

Teacher education and staff development programs would need to prepare new and experienced teachers to teach destreamed classes. School boards would need additional resources to provide such preparation, as well as textbooks, curriculum guides, and student evaluation policies appropriate to mixed-ability classrooms.[7]

What obstacles stand in the way of this vision? First, not all teachers and students want a mini-school experience. When reformers in an Arkansas school that was piloting the SWS model tried to enlarge the program, they found resistance on the part of nonvoluntary teachers and increased student dropout (Nickle, Flynt, Poynter, & Rees, 1990). Second, some specialization (e.g., high technology computer labs) would no doubt have to be sacrificed in order to fund time for teachers to plan cooperatively. Third, parents who believe their children would suffer in mixed-ability groups would probably contest destreaming. Those who could afford to would enroll their children in private schools, whereas others would seek out public schools still offering International Baccalaureate programs, honors, or advanced placement classes, or other forms of enriched streaming.

One begins to see why the SWS model has evolved as it has at Van Tech. There have been persistent pressures from above (demands from highly educated, articulate, and mobile parents; publicized gaps between student marks and their provincial exam scores) and below (high dropout rates among marginal students) to create curricular differentiation among the various schools-within-a-school. Although the SWS solution has been prone to streaming, Van Tech has mitigated at least some of its effects. The approach has been imperfect, but the available evidence suggests that the SWS model broke up the Great Big School and resulted in improved test scores and lowered withdrawal and dropout rates.

Our research team concluded that the school could further soften the tendency toward streaming by attending more closely to accountability. To date, much of the evidence suggesting the success of the mini-schools at Tech has been anecdotal, partly because district money for program evaluation has been cut. During its 1993-1994 self-study, a number of Van Tech staff members came to believe that the school should allocate some of its own resources to program evaluation. "To ensure that change is planned, coherent and results in enhanced student learning," Van Tech's *School Growth Plan* (1994) proposed that a committee of administrators and elected teachers

> develop a process to be followed when new programs are created to: 1) establish measurable goals for the new programs; 2) evaluate the success of new programs during and after implementation; 3) anticipate and minimize possible negative effects on existing programs; 4) ensure that new programs are consistent with school directions. (p. 35)

For any large school considering the SWS model and faced with the real-world pressures against complete destreaming, Van Tech offers important lessons: with enhanced accountability, the school would offer a model for sustainable, if imperfect, improvement.

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Notes

1. I use the term *mini-school* interchangeably with *school-within-a-school.* In the Vancouver School District, however, school employees tend to reserve the term mini-school for enriched programs only.
2. A fine line exists between schools-within-a-school and other kinds of special programs. The term *special program* tends to be used as a residual category for workshops, courses or course sequences, and extracurricular activities not considered part of the mainstream or regular program. Schools-within-a-school represent one type of special program.
3. As of fall 1993, 42% of the students were born outside of Canada, in 46 countries, primarily Vietnam, China, Hong Kong, El Salvador, the Philippines, and Poland. About 60% of students speak English as a second language; at any one time about 10% are enrolled in ESL classes. In addition, 7.5% of Van Tech students are First Nations, and 80% of children come from low-income families.
4. We found in parent interviews further justification for grouping French immersion with the elite programs. One parent, whose child had been in a "gifted" program at the elementary level until the program was dropped, considered transferring her daughter to a private school because "she needed the extra stimulation." But an elementary schoolteacher suggested she try French immersion instead.
5. In the Vancouver School District, people tend to refer to dropout prevention programs as *alternate* or *alternative* and avoid the potentially stigmatizing term *dropout prevention.* But because all SWS provide an alternative to the mainstream schooling experience, I have opted to use the more concrete and restrictive term *dropout prevention.*
6. Tensions similar to those found in Van Tech's cultural programs exist in the English-as-a-Second-Language Department, which serves 180 students from many cultures. Staff teach English while stressing a respect for students' native languages and cultures in the curriculum. At Van Tech many ESL teachers want students to continue to speak their own language as well as English in order to encourage cognitive growth, but they also want students to integrate into the academic and social mainstream as soon as possible. Once in regular classes, though, ESL students are felt by some non-ESL students and their parents to "distract the teachers from their main duties of teaching."
7. When the Ontario government decided to end streaming, "most teachers ... received only a few hours' orientation, and few school boards ... received additional resources" (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p. 129).

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Success at Contact: The Argument for Alternative Schools for At-risk Youth

At a time of serious budget restrictions in communities across Canada, are alternative schools an effective and cost efficient way of meeting the needs of marginalized or at-risk students? I argue that they are indeed (a) by describing the students considered at risk or marginalized in Canadian schools and the reasons that in many cases conventional high schools and particular initiatives such as streaming have failed to meet the needs of these students; (b) by discussing three different types of alternative schools and the factors associated with success in meeting the needs of at-risk or marginalized youth in these schools; and (c) by describing Contact, a Canadian alternative high school located in Toronto, to illustrate how it has successfully met the needs of a wide range of students who would be considered marginalized or at risk.

En ces temps de contraintes budgétaires sérieuses dans les communautés à travers le Canada, les écoles alternatives sont-elles vraiment efficaces et rentables et en mesure de satisfaire aux besoins des élèves qui sont marginalisé(e)s et à risque? Je maintiens qu'en effet se sont les écoles alternatives qui sont les plus en mesure de répondre aux besoins des élèves considéré(e)s comme étant les plus à risque et les plus marginalisé(e)s dans les écoles canadiennes; (a) parce que, dans plusieurs cas, les écoles secondaires conventionnelles et des initiatives particulières comme l'intégration des élèves en difficulté d'adaptation et d'apprentissage n'ont pas su répondre aux besoins énoncés pour ces élèves éprouvant de la difficulté; (b) car en discutant la nature des trois différentes sortes d'écoles alternatives et les différents facteurs associés aux succès qu'elles éprouvent en répondant aux besoins de ces jeunes à risque ou marginalisé(e)s; et (c) en décrivant l'école secondaire Contact, à Toronto, au Canada, pour illustrer comment l'école a réussi à satisfaire les divers besoins d'une population variée d'élèves qui auraient été considéré(e)s comme étant marginalisé(e)s ou à risque dans un contexte de scolarité régulière ou conventionnelles.

Much of the literature on at-risk youth suggests that alternative schools can be an effective and efficient way of meeting the needs of marginalized or at-risk students. This article begins with the description of the students considered at risk or marginalized in Canadian schools and the reasons that in many cases conventional high schools and particular initiatives such as streaming have failed to meet the needs of these students. Then follows a discussion of three different types of alternative schools and of the factors associated with success in meeting the needs of at-risk or marginalized youth in these schools. To conclude, a description of Contact, a Canadian alternative high school located in Toronto, is provided to illustrate how one school has successfully met the needs of a wide range of students who would be considered marginalized or at risk.

Contact School is one of the oldest of several alternative high schools operated by the Toronto Board of Education to provide education in ways that are best suited to specific groups of students and their communities. Contact caters to students who are dropouts,

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street youth, and at risk. The school has built a clientele that increasingly chooses to stay with the school for several years—a change for students whose pattern of secondary school participation was previously measured in weeks rather than years. The school has approximately 140 students, with a waiting list, as well as 12 teachers, three street workers, and two office staff.

Contact School is described to illustrate the problems encountered when regular high schools attempt to deal with at-risk students and the advantages of a different model for meeting the needs of marginalized youth.

Who are the marginalized or at-risk students in Canada's high schools?

The labels *at-risk student* or *marginalized youth* mask a diversity of characteristics among students. Often the students labeled this way do not conform to stereotypes. There are complex reasons for disengagement from schools. A wide range of students can become at risk of school failure, and the students at risk of dropping out are not necessarily those with the least intellectual ability. Although labels for student characteristics can be helpful to educators in deciding how best to serve the needs of students, they do not explain the nature of the interaction between at-risk students and the school that plays a crucial role in an individual's decision to drop out (Metro Youth Task Force, 1991; Morris & Pawlowich, 1992; Toronto Board of Education, 1991; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989).

In the literature on at-risk youth, three general causes of dropping out are cited. One includes social and background factors such as low socioeconomic status, single-parent home, low parental support, family crisis, community stress/conflict, family mobility, minority race or ethnicity, and limited experience of the dominant culture. A second set of factors involves personal problems that are generally independent of social class and family background. Included in this list are mental and/or physical health problems, low aspirations and self-esteem, alienation, rejection of authority, substance abuse, legal problems, trauma from divorce or death in the family, sexual orientation, pregnancy or parenting, and learning disabilities.

School factors such as retention in grade, course failure, passivity and/or boredom, truancy, suspension, and other disciplinary problems are also strongly associated with dropping out. The immediate causes of dropping out are often linked to school problems such as academic performance as measured by grades and inappropriate behavior.

These three sets of factors are interrelated and interact in complex ways, and they affect students differently. Specifically, situations or influences that affect one student's decision to drop out seem to have little effect on another's. Some students are at risk of dropping out early, whereas others suddenly find they are in trouble at a much later stage in the educational process (Metro Youth Task Force, 1991; Morris & Pawlowich 1992; Toronto Board of Education, 1991; Wehlage et al., 1989).

Contact Alternative High School draws at-risk students from throughout the Toronto area. Almost every student comes to Contact with a story that speaks of difficulties and tensions in conventional high schools. As one student explained, "Every student that's in here has a challenge. Every one of us is different in one way or another, be it through being a new Canadian, language problems, personal problems, maybe a learning disability" (Gerd, student, April 7, 1994).

Contact students come to the school for different reasons. For some the emphasis in their lives is survival:

> I got kicked out of the house when I was 16 so I was living on the street and I was going to Anonymous Secondary but they didn't want me anymore. They said they couldn't help me with welfare, and they couldn't help me to get to school (transport) ... they told me to find an alternative school so I just came here. They

> fed me here and I was living on the street so I needed it. (Rita, student, April 12, 1994)

Some students come to complete high school in order to improve work opportunities:

> I was just sitting at home because there's no work you know and I was thinking about going back to school. And I tried to go to Anonymous Tech and they wouldn't take me, and I tried Anonymous School and they wouldn't take me. My friend told me about here. So I came ... My goal is to get my grade 12, then maybe college. (Frank, student, January 20, 1994)

Other students choose Contact after having recognized long-term needs in their lives: "I dropped out in grade 9, I was home having babies for five years. I had to start here with no credits and now I'm on my last two credits. I plan to go to college and take an accounting course ... I need to make good money because I have two kids" (Sandy, student, March 1, 1994). Some students are sent to Contact not thinking about getting an education, but are surprised to discover that school could actually be a part of the world they are structuring for themselves: "I had charges and a trial coming up and at first I said 'Oh well, go to school and make it look good' but then after I was here I thought 'Oh, Geez, this is all right. I'll stick it out'" (George, student, April 12, 1994).

As the examples above clearly illustrate, there are numerous interrelated factors that lead students to become at risk of leaving school.

Is it possible to serve at-risk students or marginalized students well within the context of a conventional high school?

According to Wehlage et al. (1989) and a report published by the Toronto Board of Education on dealing with youth alienation (1991), conventional schooling seems to be successful with many youth, but is problematic for students who are at risk. Most "regular" schools assume that all students can make sense of a complex and mainly fragmented range of academic courses and can make some kind of link between what happens in school and outside school. Most schools also assume that students have fairly similar capacities and motivations for learning, that learning is not affected by the sense of isolation that some students feel in large impersonal institutions. Finally, there is a tacit assumption that students can keep their academic performance separate from the pressures of outside influences or life circumstances.

The success of a particular intervention strategy is often due in part to its timeliness and its match with particular types of students with particular types of problems. Therefore, the diversity that exists among at-risk students demands a corresponding variety in intervention strategies, if regular schools want to prevent at-risk youth from leaving. Many schools need to develop innovative ways to meet the needs of their students, and many educators agree that a steady diet of more-of-the-same curriculum and teaching is unlikely to engage at-risk students who have a history of failure.

Three impediments to learning that exist for all students but that particularly affect at-risk youth within the context of many high schools are (a) the perceived lack of relevance of school work that is not directly linked to valued goals in students' lives; (b) a dominant learning process that is often highly abstract, verbal, passive, individualistic, competitive, and controlled by others; and (c) teachers are more concerned with the coverage of the subject than whether the students are motivated and actually learning something.

Although attention to diversity is critical, it is important to recognize that all adolescents share some common needs and goals that most schools traditionally have made efforts to address. These include the need to acquire a personal sense of confidence and success, to develop a sense of identity and social integration, and to acquire the socially

useful knowledge and skills that make an individual a good worker, parent, and citizen. In order to retain at-risk youth in school and provide them with a valuable education, both the importance of these common goals and the need to respond to the particular needs of marginalized students must be recognized.

Wehlage et al. (1989) as well as the Reference Group on Youth Alienation at the Toronto Board of Education (1991) found the need for substantial changes in the structure of regular schools to respond to the diversity of students and to help them achieve common goals. Specifically, they point to the necessity of reforms in teaching, curriculum, and social relations between adults and students in order for at-risk students to stay in school and achieve their goals. According to them, these changes would require substantial restructuring of schools and a redefinition of teaching roles.

How successful has streaming been as an intervention strategy for at-risk students?

Streaming is a common intervention strategy adopted by many regular high schools in an attempt to respond to the diversity of students. However, the following synthesis of the research in this area shows that at-risk students generally have not benefited from this initiative. Divisions among students and the corresponding differentiation of curriculum and instruction have lasting consequences in terms of academic achievement, attitudes, peer associations, and school careers.

In most high schools courses designated as low-stream or ability offer greater exposure to less demanding topics and skills, whereas high stream classes typically include more complex material and more difficult thinking and problemsolving tasks. Oakes (1985), for example, found that high-stream secondary students were more often presented with traditional academic and intellectually challenging skills. Another finding was that the high-stream teachers identified the development of competent and autonomous thinkers as one of their most important goals. On the other hand, teachers in low-stream classes often emphasized basic literacy and computational skills and presented topics associated with everyday life and work, while expecting conformity to rules and expectations. In contrast to regular and high-stream classes, teachers in low-stream science and math classes spent more time on routines, more frequently provided seatwork and worksheet activities, and introduced technology such as computers in conjunction with low-level tasks such as computation (Oakes, 1990).

Nystrand and Gamoran (1988) and Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends, and Lepore (1995) also found great discrepancies in what happened in remedial, regular, and high-stream English classes. High-stream English classes were more often characterized by authentic assignments, student control over work, and higher-order cognitive tasks than were low-stream classes. The results of their research suggest that achievement inequality could be reduced by raising the caliber of both instructional content and instructional discourse in regular and remedial stream classes.

According to Oakes (1990), although some schools rotate the teaching to low- and high-ability classes among teachers, in many other schools teachers either jockey among themselves for high-stream teaching positions, or principals use class assignments as rewards and sanctions. For example, teachers of low-ability math and science classes are usually less experienced, less likely to be certified in math or science, hold fewer degrees in these subjects, and have less training in the use of computers.

Gamoran and Berends (1987) believe that streaming most probably affects achievement through the combination of separating students into different groups and providing different knowledge and learning conditions to these groups. Slavin (1990) reviewed studies comparing heterogeneous and homogeneous groups in secondary schools and found that no group benefited academically from being in streamed classes. Studies of streamed secondary schools also showed evidence of an increasing disparity between

high- and low-stream students as time went by. This could be explained by the fact that students in the top groups generally had considerably more curricular and instructional advantages than students in low-stream classes.

It is often claimed that streaming imparts an identity to students that influences their future educational opportunities and life chances. Research supports this claim, providing evidence of a lack of mobility of students between the various levels of high school streams. In fact, there is a pronounced shift downward as students who are not achieving to the satisfaction of school officials are encouraged to enroll in less academically challenging courses (Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller, 1992). Data gathered in the province of Ontario show that students in lower-stream classes drop out much more frequently than their counterparts in the high stream (King & Hughes, 1985).

Streaming predominates in secondary schools in Ontario, partly because it is official policy. Despite the apparent decline in numbers of low-stream students in some parts of the province, only sporadic and marginal initiatives have been taken to change the ways the needs of working class and ethnic/racial minority students are dealt with in schools (Curtis et al., 1992).

The following statements from three staff members at Contact Alternative High School show how their experience with students confirms the research findings described above:

> Streaming has definitely had a negative impact on many students at Contact. In addition to the barriers associated with basic level credits, some students believe that they are stupid or are convinced that they are incapable of achieving academic success at a general or advanced level. These feelings turn out to be obstacles to actually being successful and they become self-fulfilling prophecies. It is difficult to help students rebuild their confidence. I believe that streaming contributes to the high dropout rate in Ontario because it stigmatizes and segregates students and convinces them that they aren't good enough. (Sean, coordinator, questionnaire, 1996)

> Streaming has saddled students with useless credits. They arrive at our doors not being able to do math, write essays and especially not able to think independently about academics. Yet their Ontario Student Records say they have finished grade 10 perhaps. They often have street smarts though. The streaming system is a criminal waste of human talent and potential. Our students have been pushed ahead at some point in their schooling because someone didn't want to stop and educate them. So from that point on they are streamed so that no one seriously expects them to learn anymore. (Jerzy, street worker, questionnaire, 1996)

> I have seen some students who were previously streamed into basic or general level courses and could have handled general or advanced level, respectively. It usually takes these students quite a while to feel confident enough to take a risk and try to work at the higher level, and some aren't at Contact long enough to be convinced they can try. I think the problem of tracking at the high school level represents the tip of the iceberg for most of these students since they have often become convinced of their inadequacy and poor skills long before they reach high school. I don't think most high school teachers have the time or resources to accommodate the learning needs of every individual in a classful of 30 or more students. Subsequently, they believe it's a kinder alternative to let a student experience success in a basic level class rather than let him fail a general level class, because his learning takes place at a different rate. (Judy, teacher, questionnaire, 1996)

Although the sociopolitical context in the United States is different from the context in which Canadian secondary schools are embedded, the effects of streaming appear to be similar in both countries. In Canada, because education is a provincial matter, there are no national guidelines on streaming. Each province has its own policy on streaming. In Ontario streaming begins in grade 10 and continues to the end of high school, whereas in Quebec the practice of streaming was phased out more than a decade ago.

In addition to streaming, high schools across Canada have experimented with different strategies and programs in an attempt to respond to the needs of at-risk students. In the next section, I discuss the effectiveness of some of these programs.

How successful have supplemental programs and school within school programs been for at-risk students?

Gaskell (1995) reports on a range of initiatives to support at-risk students in a number of "exemplary" high schools across Canada. However, the data provided are not detailed enough for us to know just how successful these various intervention strategies have been in retaining at-risk students in school while helping them to achieve academically.

On the other hand, two large US studies of extensive dropout prevention programs conducted in 36 high schools and 98 middle schools between 1984 and 1990 (Grannis, 1992; Meyer, 1990) found that neither of the two programs had accomplished very much in terms of gains in student attendance, retention, and courses passed. They recommended that the programs be extensively redesigned to restructure the schools involved.

Grannis (1992) and Meyer (1990) both identified as a problem the piecemeal approach by which the changes introduced were mere supplements to existing programs and arrangements rather than a revamping of them. The focus was on the adoption of discrete measures rather than on outcomes. Only a few of the schools involved in the studies showed evidence of extensive or fundamental changes.

Another study looked at the success of magnet schools in meeting the needs of at-risk students (Crain, Heebner, & Si, 1992). A comparison of magnet schools housed in regular high schools and magnet schools housed separately showed that the programs that completely separated the magnet and nonmagnet students were substantially more effective with respect to both dropout prevention and educational accomplishment. It seems that schools-within-schools did not significantly alter the school experience for at-risk students.

In an interim study focusing on the New Futures Initiative, a project aimed at increasing the life chances of disadvantaged youth by promoting institutional change in the schools and other agencies, Wehlage, Smith, and Lipman (1992) found that New Futures had not yet initiated the comprehensive restructuring of the schools that would be needed to address the problems of at-risk youth. The intervention strategies adopted were supplemental and left the experiences of students and teachers basically unchanged. These interventions were aimed at only a few students and left most of the programming unchanged in the schools. The assumption was that it was necessary to "fix" students who were deficient in various ways and that supplemental or remedial programs would be sufficient to do so. Changing only selected institutional characteristics was not viewed as an effective way of responding to the needs of at-risk students.

When asked whether they believed Contact could be run as effectively if it were housed in a wing of a conventional secondary school, staff at Contact answered in the negative. This response appears to confirm the research findings cited above. Here is what the coordinator of the Contact responded:

> Last year when we were looking for a new space for our school, there was talk of putting us in Anonymous Collegiate and Technical Institute. Fortunately, it

> turned out that they didn't want us as much as we didn't want to be placed with them. I've included a section from a letter we wrote to explain our opposition to the idea.
>
> Contact is a school that exists as an alternative for students who have not been successful in schools like Anonymous Collegiate and Technical Institute. Students who leave large collegiates or institutions need an alternative where they can thrive in a smaller more personal setting. This is why Contact was founded, and our school has long been recognized as providing an excellent learning environment for these students. We feel that if we were move to a large institutional school like Anonymous Collegiate and Technical Institute we would no longer be an alternative and would not be able to attract students who would be most in need of a school like ours. Put simply, students would not come to Contact if it were located in Anonymous Collegiate and Technical Institute.
>
> Contact previously coexisted in a public school and it was not a workable arrangement. There were numerous incidents that became a constant source of irritation for the principal and the signing officer at Contact. Students were polled frequently for suggestions for solving these problems and indicated that the best solution would be to exist in a separate school. Staff felt that for the students' self-esteem, it was crucial to have a separate identity and not to merely be an appendage of another school's program. (Sean, coordinator, questionnaire, January 1996)

The comments of this street worker also confirm that the school-within-a-school concept is problematic:

> I can't predict exactly how it would change but I can imagine many problems that would come up. These would start to impinge on the freedom we allow our students and the maturity we expect of them. It would also be harder to deal with the riskier students if we were within a straight school. They would be afraid to go there unless we could maintain a real separation between the two student groups. Just ask our students how many hang out with students from collegiates and you would get an idea of how much they would not like to be jammed into one. (Jerzy, street worker, questionnaire, January 1996)

The research cited above seems to support the need for alternative schools in addressing the needs of at-risk students. As it is likely that not all alternative schools are equal, it is worthwhile exploring a typology of such schools.

A Typology for Alternative Schools

In a recent article, Raywid (1995) provides a typology for alternative schools, proposing three distinct ideal types of alternative schools. Individual schools with their diverse histories and purposes approximate these to varying degrees.

Raywid (1995) describes Type 1 alternatives as the ideological progeny of the early 1960s programs that aimed at making school engaging, challenging, and fulfilling for both students and teachers. Early Type 1 alternative schools have created a number of innovative programs and arrangements that are now viewed as improvement measures appropriate for all schools. Type 1 schools typically reflect organizational, administrative, and programmatic departures from the traditional. Type 1 alternatives are schools of choice that enjoy a high level of popularity. These schools are sometimes programmatically similar to magnet schools because of the themes and instructional innovations emphasized.

Type 2 alternative schools are programs to which students are often sent just prior to expulsion. One of the distinctive characteristics of Type 2 programs is that they are

assumed to be temporary measures for at-risk students. Some type of behavior modification is usually the focus of Type 2 programs, and there is generally no attempt to modify curriculum or pedagogy. In fact many Type 2 programs try to have students complete the same work as students in regular classes. However, the students are likely to be working on these assignments alone, because most of the time the assignments are designed for individual completion. Other Type 2 alternatives may involve a basics-oriented curriculum that emphasizes factual knowledge and elementary skills.

Type 3 alternatives are more positive and compassionate in orientation than Type 2 programs. They are designed for students who are presumed to need extra help, remediation, or rehabilitation at an academic, social, or emotional level. If jail could be a metaphor for Type 2 alternatives, then therapy would be the best metaphor for Type 3 programs. The assumption is that, after sufficient treatment, successful students will be able to return to regular secondary or postsecondary institutions. Type 3 alternatives often focus on remedial work with high-structure tasks, while providing support to students to grow socially and emotionally. Alternative schools are usually identifiable as one or another of these three ideal types, although particular programs can be something of a mix.

One important difference between these three types of schools is whether students choose or are assigned to the school. Students choose Type 1 alternatives, whereas students are assigned to Type 2 schools. Type 3 programs often include some combination of choice and referral. This difference is important because the choice feature is associated with positive results and is considered particularly advantageous with marginal students, who often believe that they have little control over what happens to them in the school setting.

Another important difference between these three types of alternatives relates to the underlying assumption about what needs to be changed, the program or the student. Type 1 schools assume that by changing a school's program and environment, one can change the behavior, performance, and achievement of those associated with it. Type 2 and 3 alternatives assume that some students are not successful because of emotional, intellectual, or character deficiency. This assumption shapes the program and often inhibits the kind of responsiveness that is typical in Type 1 schools when it comes to providing the conditions necessary for the success of the students.

Contact Alternative High School could be considered a hybrid of Types 1 and 3. In the following comments, Sean, the coordinator of Contact, provides support for Contact being a Type 1 alternative school:

> Our students don't need to be "fixed." What's really broken is the conveyor belt system of education that has as its underlying and hidden curriculum the message that students/citizens have no power in schools/society, so they shouldn't even try to change things. (Sean, coordinator, questionnaire, 1996)

In 1972 the proposal for Contact described a school that would "remotivate the student and reestablish in him a sense of self-worth" by "giving attention to the individual needs and interests of the student; providing flexibility for the development of greater responsibility for decisions made by the students; and, increasing personal contact and rapport between all members of the community" (p. 10). The extent to which the goals of the initiators are being realized in the Contact School of today is considerable.

Contact is shaped by the harsh urban environment in which it is situated and by the philosophies of education that are lived out in the school. The small school community has evolved as an antidote to the lives students have lived, and continue to live, in that it provides a place of security, stability, and hope in the inner city.

At Contact the school priorities have evolved over more than 20 years and reflect an interpretation of the educational system that is based on student need. The school programs cluster around the survival of each student, academic achievement, and the expansion of each student's understanding of his or her present and future role in society. Each dimension of the program priorities offers opportunities for each student to improve his or her life, whether by surviving, by completing credits, and/or by becoming aware of new possibilities in his or her life.

The typology of alternative schools described above suggests that Type 1 and 3 alternative schools would be more successful than either Type 2 alternatives or regular secondary schools at meeting the needs of at-risk students. In order to better understand what makes these types of schools successful, it is important to consider the specific factors associated with success in meeting the needs of marginalized youth in alternative schools.

Factors Associated with Success in Meeting the Needs of Marginalized Youth in Alternative Schools

The record of Type 2 schools suggests that they often serve no purpose other than ridding conventional classrooms of disruptive students. The record of Type 3 programs is stronger. These alternatives are based on the assumption that students can be helped to succeed in conventional schools. The programs tend to stress personal-emotional development, reeducation, and academic remediation. The environments they provide are typically supportive, with positive student-adult relationships and considerable amounts of individual attention in small-scale settings. The behavior of students usually improves in Type 3 alternatives. In such schools, Gold and Mann (1984) report increased attendance and fewer disciplinary incidents, as well as academic gains in terms of credit accumulation and/or knowledge and skills acquired. However, these changes often last only as long as students remain in the alternative school.

Studies of Type 1 alternative schools tell different stories. They document dramatic gains and turnarounds for students who had detested and even left school, describe students whose problematic behavior disappeared in the alternative school setting, and record impressive academic gains for other students (Beattie, Robertson, & Stiegelbauer, 1995; Gagné & Robertson, 1995; Raywid, 1990). There are also stories of highly effective alternative schools marked by high levels of achievement and commitment on the part of students, teachers and parents (Beattie et al., 1995).

Wehlage et al. (1989) proposed a framework for studying the effectiveness of alternative schools. Their research led them to conclude that in order to succeed with at-risk students, alternative schools need to be communities of support. Such communities are those with which students want to be affiliated and where they are truly educationally engaged.

In a national study, Raywid (1982) found that alternative schools identified the interpersonal relationships fostered by the school climate as their most distinctive characteristic. The schools regarded these relationships as more critical than instructional strategies. In spite of this, successful alternative schools make great efforts to individualize and personalize classroom practices, including the pace at which student can work, the content of the curriculum, and the assignments they are asked to complete. In fact effective alternative schools are characterized by a high level of instructional creativity, where the emphasis is placed on making the curriculum compelling and challenging, as well as responsive to the needs and interests of students. The curriculum in these successful schools often involves more experiential learning and field-based practica. In addition, the educational goals go beyond traditional academic goals to include the emotional and social development of students as well. Combined with their emphasis

on emotional support, successful programs for at-risk students attend to the more difficult task of helping students to take charge of their own learning and personal lives.

There are a number of other characteristics that seem to be associated with effective alternative schools. These include the small size of the schools and the separateness of the physical location of the schools, as well as the distinctiveness of the programs, staff, and students of the school. In addition, the privileged nature of the relationship between teachers and students is another critical component of successful alternative schools. Broader role definitions for teachers as advisors, friends, mentors, and advocates are key to the success of alternative schools, because these various roles enable teachers to interact with students at multiple levels. Effective alternative schools are also characterized by a high level of organizational flexibility as well as a minimum of formality. Successful alternative schools seem to maintain social control by developing norms for behavior rather than imposing rules and regulations that may be seen as arbitrary.

Choice at various levels is an important component contributing the success of alternative schools. When students and parents choose specific schools, it is possible to build a community that shares some common concerns or beliefs. Choice can also strengthen the bond between the students and the school and enhance their feeling of membership in the school community. Choice at a programmatic level usually ensures higher levels of motivation and commitment on the part of students, as well as a greater sense of responsibility on the part of the teachers.

Alternative schools where teachers are actively involved in the development of curricular programs and in determining school policy are also more effective in supporting at-risk students, because of teachers' feelings of empowerment, ownership, and shared responsibility. Students' involvement in decisionmaking processes also leads to feelings of empowerment and commitment for students in alternative schools.

It is a complex web of factors that seems to lead to the creation of a school environment that is supportive of, and responsive to, at-risk students. Although it may seem challenging to create a secondary school that embodies the many characteristics described above, Contact Alternative High School has been successful in doing so to a great degree. The following description of Contact attests to this.

Contact School: An Example of an Alternative High School Effectively Meeting the Needs of At-risk Students

The Philosophy of Contact School

Foundational to Contact School is the philosophy of education shared by the teachers and street workers. Each person—whether student, teacher, or street worker—is valued equally; and the school is viewed as a forum to effect social change by redressing social inequities for its participants. Bound by allegiance to these principles, Contact has become a responsive, organic unit where social, cultural, and organizational structures have evolved as scaffolding for the ethos of the school.

Personal Connections, Acceptance, and Caring

In Contact personal connections, acceptance, and caring provide a secure and nurturing environment for young people who may have been quite broken emotionally in their lives. The students are supported to draw on their own resources in order to make choices and to accept responsibility. They are also enabled to reach out to others with empathy and as citizens of the society to which they belong. At Contact School authentic interhuman relations are central to supporting school success. Students who come to Contact have chosen or been driven to an educational path outside the traditional paths provided by society. Their many successes in Contact, some small and some life-changing, are the result of experiences there that contribute to their sense of self-worth and their sense that they are valuable members of the school community.

Stephen, a teacher at Contact, sums it up like this: "This school runs from the heart. I don't think that there is one teacher who doesn't give all of themselves" (interview, April 8, 1994). Ben, a student, believes that all students are liked by at least one teacher: "I have one teacher who I know cares about me and cares about everyone else whether they be obnoxious, loudmouth or rude" (interview, April 20, 1994). Sandy, also a student says: "Everybody likes me and I like just about all the teachers. Yeah, I think the teachers are very solid human beings. Yeah, in order to handle a lifestyle like this you have to be solid because a lot of kids come in here with a lot of problems" (March 1, 1994).

Choices for Students

The learning and teaching at Contact are closely linked to personal freedoms, which in Contact means that students can choose and determine their own actions to a much greater extent than they can in a traditional high school. By making and valuing choices that can contribute to their present and future lives, each student is engaged in a process of creating a meaningful life that is shaped by his or her choices. These opportunities for choices provide each student with the possibility of confronting choice honestly and of determining the emerging meanings in their lives.

The following notice, which summarizes Contact School's philosophy regarding choice, is posted at eye level on a door that every student passes through more than once a day:

> We must never be blinded by the futile philosophy that we are just the hapless victims of our inheritance, our life experience and of our surroundings—that these are the sole forces that make our decisions for us. This is not the road to freedom. We have to believe that we can really choose.

Teachers' and Street Workers' Roles

In Contact, a high level of school autonomy prevails. Teachers, street workers, and office staff make the decisions that support the day-to-day running of the school and the decisions that will shape the future running of the school. Because of this, all staff members at Contact have a good sense of what is going on throughout the school, a set of understandings that informs their daily lives in the school, which was referred to by one teacher as empowering.

Teachers have worked both in their teaching roles and in roles as organizers of the school. In this way, not only have educational needs been supported by timely organizational decisions, but the successes of the decisionmaking have, as do the successes of teaching, affirmed the competence of teachers as organizers of the school. The autonomy of Contact school is more than the wresting of authority and power from those external to the school or from the bureaucracy: it is the means by which the teachers in Contact can engage fully and effectively in the nurturing of education in the school. John, one of the teachers, explained it this way: "Here I think the morale is really good in comparison to other schools because teachers are all in it together and they have no resentment about decisions that are made because they were all involved" (interview, March 28, 1994).

Program Priorities

The philosophies of education at Contact and the needs of students in the school community drive the priorities for programming. There are three priorities in the program, each equally important in the school, and each promising growth and benefit to all the students. One priority focuses on the survival needs of the students. This priority is carried out principally by the street workers, by special support services professionals such as the counselors and the nurses and by the teachers. Another priority is the academic program at Contact, which provides a range of compensatory education,

credit courses, and educational experiences that will enable the students to expand their work and their horizons. The remaining priority is the program component that aims at connecting the students to the world by providing opportunities to enhance their awareness and increase their participation in the school and in the larger community. This priority also aims at providing opportunities for students who are alienated to rejoin the world on a personal level. A description of each of the program priorities illustrates further how Contact School meets the needs of its students.

Priority One: Meeting the Survival Needs of Students

Administrators, teachers, street workers, and students at Contact agree that learning cannot take place until the survival needs of the students are met. The needs that students bring to Contact vary. Some students have more needs than others. However, the majority of students have greater needs than most students attending other secondary schools. Contact is considered an inner-city school and its rating on the poverty index indicates that its students are among the poorest in the school district. Many students choose to come to Contact because their academic, psychosocial, and material needs were not being met in other secondary schools.

Members of the Contact community meet the students' needs by providing material and psychosocial support through a number of different programs. These include a nutrition program for students who come to school hungry; help in applying for welfare and transportation bursaries; funding for winter coats for those who cannot afford this expense; access to children's clothing for single parents; access to a school nurse, social worker, and psychoeducational consultant for those with physical or psychological health problems; a women's group for victims of abuse; and help with finding appropriate housing and day care.

Priority Two: The Educational Advancement of Students

The teachers at Contact are aware that many of their students need special support in order to succeed academically. A large percentage of the students have had mostly negative school experiences. Several were diagnosed as learning disabled in elementary school or had social and/or emotional problems that led to a number of different school related problems.

The Toronto Board of Education and the staff at Contact recognize the challenging nature of the student body. For this reason various compensatory measures have been adopted to support Contact students as they reintegrate into the school system and attempt to accumulate the academic credits necessary for secondary school certification.

Inner-city Budget

The various measures taken to help students negotiate their way through the system include the allocation of a special inner-city budget, which is determined according to a complex formula. The funds received can be used only for certain activities and programs including field trips, the purchase of winter coats for some students, and the nutrition program. The purpose is to enable students to focus on getting high school credits by making sure that some of their most basic survival needs are taken care of.

Class Size

The teachers, street workers, and students agree that the smaller size of classes at Contact is a key element that contributes to the success of the school. When asked what recommendations they have for policymakers with regard to successful practices in secondary schools, students, teachers, and street workers almost unanimously mentioned the importance of keeping the size of the school and the classes small.

Registration Policies and Practices

The registration policies and practices also differ from those at conventional secondary schools. An information session describing Contact School is offered every week by one of the street workers. Registration is continuous during September and continues at the beginning of every three-week block except for the last two blocks of the school year. Each student is allowed three chances per year to register.

All permanent students must comply with the criteria for continuing registration at Contact; that is, they must attend, work in class, and behave appropriately. If these criteria are not met a student can be placed on a three-week probation. Two or more staff must nominate a student during the same time block before he or she can be placed on probation. Before the student is nominated, the nominator must talk with the student regarding the problem.

The ON/OFF Committee meets once every three weeks and is composed of the coordinator and the street workers. Its purpose is to determine whether a student should remain on the rolls or not. An evaluation sheet for each student is circulated to all staff prior to these meetings. Equal consideration is given to attendance, behavior, and work when considering whether a student remains on or is taken off the rolls. A student who is being evaluated and who has concerns is encouraged to attend the meeting.

Attendance Policies and Practices

In an attempt to help students who have not been successful in traditional high schools where fairly high attendance rates are expected, Contact has adopted more flexible attendance requirements. Fifty percent attendance is required for morning classes in English, math, and the student's selected option. Seventy percent attendance is required for oral communications classes. Sixty-seven percent attendance is required for nonparticipatory afternoon classes, whereas 80% attendance is required for participatory afternoon classes such as drama or physical education. Teachers, street workers, and students all agree that it is necessary to have flexible attendance requirements because attendance has become a chronic problem for many students at Contact. However, a student on the permanent roll who misses three days in any given block without excuse may be placed on probation. This student would normally have an interview with his or her street worker. At the end of the block, he or she would be evaluated at the student status evaluation meeting described above.

An important part of the street workers' responsibilities involves checking on student attendance, which they do by calling students at home when they have not shown up to find out why they are not in school. These calls allow the street workers to determine whether the student is simply having problems with oversleeping or whether there are more serious problems affecting attendance. These telephone calls are extremely useful because they often allow the street workers to uncover pressing needs that they can help the students to deal with.

Use of Contracts

In recent years the teachers and street workers at Contact have begun to use various types of contracts with students. These are used to help students develop new behaviors that will make them more successful in school. There are different types of contracts to help students work on changing different types of behavior. A term contract requires that a student earn a specified number of credits during the term. An attendance contract targets improved attendance. A work contract aims to increase productivity in class, and a behavior contract focuses on changing inappropriate behavior, such as using abusive language. Not fulfilling a contract usually leads either to being placed on probation or being taken off the rolls. For example, a student would be taken off the rolls

because of failure to meet the conditions of a term contract and would only be allowed to reenroll after being off the rolls for one term.

Tutorial Weeks

There are three tutorial weeks during the year, one at the end of each term. During these weeks, teachers are expected to be in their classroom areas ready to help students complete the term's work. These three tutorial weeks are lifesavers for many students who need more flexibility in terms of deadlines than other secondary schools can offer.

Teaching/Learning Strategies—Personalization and Individualization

One of the most important things that teachers do to help students become academically successful is to individualize and personalize as many aspects of the program as possible. Students are actively involved in determining which courses will be offered, as they are consulted before the timetable for each term is drawn up. In addition, many teachers negotiate the content of their courses with the students. Most teachers also allow the students some choice with regard to the major and minor assignments that are required to complete the course. The most important way in which teachers support the students' academic development is by making the content of the courses as real, meaningful, and relevant as possible to the lives of the students. The teachers at Contact spend a great deal of time making sure their courses are kept up to date so that they stay in tune with the needs of their current students.

Scheduling the Classes

In order to increase the probability of students getting credit for the courses they take, Contact School has a unique schedule. The morning classes are offered over three semesters, whereas the afternoon classes are offered in an intensive way in three-week blocks. Each three-week afternoon course is worth one third of a credit, and students must take three such courses in one area in order to earn a full credit. In some cases students can combine parts of credits accumulated in the morning or afternoon in order to make up full credits.

Courses Offered

A wide range of courses is offered at Contact School. Some of these would be considered traditional, as they are offered in every high school across the country, whereas others are unique. The purpose of offering a range of traditional courses is to ensure that students can accumulate course credits in compulsory subjects such as math and English. Nontraditional courses are offered to respond to the special needs and interests of the students enrolled at Contact. The students are consulted during the general meeting to find out what courses they would like to have offered the following term. The teachers often develop new courses in response to the requests of students. The following course titles provide an idea of the range of nontraditional courses offered at Contact: Native Literature and Creative Writing; English Writing—How to Write a Term Paper; Personal Life Management—Street Law; Society: Challenge and Change; Psychology; Native Studies; American Black Studies; Lesbian and Gay Fiction; and Film.

Level of Courses

Many of the courses at Contact are offered at both the general and advanced levels for students in grades 10 through 12. However, none of the courses is offered at the basic level, because part of the mandate at Contact is to help students get back on track academically. Basic level courses are not offered because they are considered dead-end courses, that is, they do not allow students to go on beyond high school. Many of the students that come to Contact have been registered at the basic level in other high schools and have lost a great deal of self-esteem as a result of being labeled as *basic level students*.

The Compulsory Oral English Class

The Oral English class is a compulsory course for all students at Contact. It is at the heart of the program and is offered during the morning schedule over a 33-week period. The many components of this course include the weekly Speaker's Hour, the weekly general meeting, field trips for the whole school, the affirmative actions days, the nutrition program, the recycling program, and the group class focusing on listening and speaking skills. It is an important aspect of the Contact school curriculum, because through its many parts teachers can work toward actualizing all three of the programming priorities.

Reporting of Marks

Contact School assigns only passing marks and records these on students' report cards. Other marks are coded as "no marks assigned." Any student who gets less than a 50% mark will receive a "no mark assigned" code and must repeat the course until credit is obtained.

Teaching/Learning Strategies Across Courses

Teachers at Contact employ a wide range of teaching-learning strategies in an attempt to engage students in the learning process. Students value the variety of teaching styles among the teachers at Contact. Teachers and students agree that these different ways of approaching teaching and learning are invaluable to the academic success of students at Contact. In order to illustrate this diversity, a number of afternoon classes are described below.

In Steve's World Religions course the students experienced meditation first hand. At the beginning of class, Steve closed and locked the door so that there would be no disturbances. The windowless room was lit with only one candle placed in the middle of the room, which was furnished with a rug and cushions placed in a circle. The students sat on cushions in silence and followed Steve's instructions, which led them through a 45-minute meditation involving sitting, standing, and walking. Steve then asked them to comment on this experience and reflect on the purpose of meditation in religion.

In Julie's Community Outreach course the students heard about the kind of placements available, which ranged from volunteering in a residence for seniors located nearby to assisting the kindergarten and grade 1 teachers in a neighborhood school. They also went over a report form that they were to complete after their first visit to their volunteer work site. In preparation for their work placement, Julie had the students prepare a curriculum vitae based on a model she provided. The students received individualized help as they wrote their CVs.

In Michael's Drama class the students received instructions for the first activity while they were seated in a circle on the floor. They then worked in pairs to prepare a short scene that had been distributed without mention of who the two characters were. It was up to the students to determine the identity of the two people and to prepare to present the scene to the rest of the class in such a way that they would be able to guess the identity of the two characters. The cast of characters invented by the students included two soldiers on the front line, two streetwalkers, a brother and a sister, and a woman in labor with her partner at her side.

In Sharon's Wendo class the students were introduced to a female lawyer who has experience working with women who need legal counsel. After she had introduced the guest and provided some background, the students, who were seated comfortably in a circle, were invited to ask whatever questions came to mind. The students, all women, seemed a little shy initially. However, after a short time they asked questions on topics ranging from laying rape charges to child custody and from witness protection to gay bashing.

In John's Paper Making class the students worked at their own pace as they had all reached different stages in making paper. John circulated from student to student to respond to questions and demonstrate skills or provide extra materials as necessary. In the background music played softly, because this had been requested by the students at the beginning of the class.

In Sean's Co-op Journalism course students prepared to role-play job interviews in the field of journalism by brainstorming the kind of questions that would be likely to arise in such interviews. Then, one at a time, the students took turns being interviewed. Afterward, the student who was interviewed was asked to leave the room while the remaining students discussed this student's strengths and weaknesses. The student was then invited to come and join the group to receive feedback on the job interview. Before their break the students negotiated with Sean as to what they would do during the second half of the class.

Priority Three: Connecting With the World

Sean, a teacher, described the third programming priority at Contact in this way:

> I always thought schools did a really good job in convincing students they are powerless ... I think what we try to do is show them they can make a difference. Education is much more than jobs and university—it's about changing the world and interacting with the world. (interview, April 8, 1994)

One of the goals of the teachers at Contact is to show their students that a whole world exists beyond the walls of the school and of the students' own experiences. The purpose is to expand students' horizons and introduce them to new possibilities. They do this by inviting guest speakers and teachers to the school. A Speaker's Hour is scheduled each week on Tuesday mornings. Its purpose is to expose students to a range of people with different experiences and opinions on various subjects related to the written and unwritten curriculum. Doreen, one of the teachers, explained that by having speakers in every week they hoped to bring the curriculum to life; that is, the teachers wish to prove to students that the issues they are exploring in class live beyond the walls of the school. A number of teachers at Contact also invite guests to their classes so their students can get important information related to their course work directly from an expert.

What makes Contact so different from many other schools—that is, its inclusiveness and its belief in the equality of each of its members—is borne out in the school's strong antidiscriminatory and nonviolence policies. These policies are far more than statements neatly presented on paper—they are a reality at Contact. The antidiscriminatory and nonviolence policies are visible in all school activities.

Potential students first hear about the strong antidiscriminatory and nonviolence policies at Contact during the information sessions, which are designed to introduce them to the school. Students wishing to register at Contact are then asked to sign the student code of conduct, which includes a clear statement of these policies. The moment that students enter the school, they are faced with walls covered with posters that make it clear that all are welcome at Contact whether they be Native, gay, poor, or otherwise. Many of the posters invite students to become actively involved in antiracist, antisexist, and antihomophobic activities. The students are made even more aware of the policies in their oral English group class and other classes, where it is the responsibility of the teachers to make these policies explicit and implement them as appropriate. Three special days focused on various aspects of discrimination are the most powerful tools for raising the awareness of students about racism, sexism, homophobia, and the role of violence in each. All regular classes are canceled for those days.

Giving students a say in what happens in their school as well as an opportunity to shape the world around them by becoming politically active is evidence of the strong role played by critical pedagogy at Contact. These opportunities arise in classroom discussions in many of the courses. The presenters invited to Speaker's Hour are often affiliated to a sociopolitically active association and are usually passionate about a particular cause. These speakers often tell students about ways that they can become actively involved, and they encourage them to join them in fighting for their cause. Also, many opportunities are presented to students during the weekly general meeting, where anybody can put an item on the agenda. Therefore, each week there are students, street workers, and teachers who tell the students about certain problematic situations and invite them to join a protest, sign a petition, write a letter, or make a phone call in protest.

Although helping students connect with the world is referred to as the third programming priority, the teachers and street workers who have forged the organizational structures at Contact would say that the third priority is no less important than helping students earn academic credits. They view the process of developing sociopolitical awareness and learning strategies for personal and social change as equally important to earning academic credit. One without the other is worth little.

Contact's Mission and Related Concerns

The voices of these two Contact School teachers restate the school's mission and describe some of Contact's limitations in meeting the needs of at-risk students:

> Contact School exists to serve students who, for one reason or another, have not received their high school diploma. Our primary purpose, therefore is to help students to graduate. Along the road, we strive to help students with other basic necessities of life like food, clothing and housing. Educationally, we teach our students to speak up and to listen to each other; to critically examine their lives and our world with a view to making positive changes in society. We do all this by trying to create a caring and supportive school community where dedicated teachers serve empowered students. We are also in the business of rebuilding students' self-esteem and self-confidence so that when they leave us they are stronger people. We are an oasis of tolerance and learning in a harsh urban environment.
>
> Having said all that, it is true that many students do not stay; our turnover rate each three-week block is very high. Clearly, we are not serving many of the at-risk students who come through our doors. Some students cannot live on below poverty welfare rates; some are tired of the stigma, hassles and harassment that come with the cheque each month; some give up because of bad experiences with school and/or low skill levels; some feel absolutely overwhelmed by the enormous task of completing 30 credits over four or five years and some are too busy trying to escape from life (partying excessively, sleeping all day) to be able to attend school.
>
> So we do well with the many at-risk students that we reach; at the same time, however, we don't reach many others. There are, of course, things that we could do better at Contact to reach more students. I hope that we can continue to grow and improve so that we do a better job with at-risk students. (Sean, coordinator, questionnaire, January 1996)
>
> Not every at-risk student finds the Contact environment suits their particular needs. However, for students who don't work well within the more rigid structure of a large school, Contact offers a more acceptable approach to learning. I think that many of our students have chafed under the authoritarian structure of

these schools, and still others have been unable to continue in a rigid system when their life circumstances mean they tend to be in and out of school for various lengths of time.

Contact School is more successful in meeting the needs of some marginalized youth. The important part is that it represents a choice for students who can't function well in regular schools. We need to have a variety of alternative schools offering different environments and different approaches to academic success. No single system is ever going to serve the needs of all students. (Judy, teacher, questionnaire, January 1996)

To summarize, the staff at Contact believe that in order to learn students first need to develop better self-esteem. Then, if students are to take advantage of the academic credits they can earn in high school, they must also learn strategies to help redress the social inequities that in many cases led them to be marginalized in the first place. It would be difficult for students to build on their academic success by finding stable employment or going on for further study if they did not have the self-esteem to do so and the strategies necessary to help change the impoverished and problematic world in which they live.

The school priorities at Contact reflect an interpretation of the educational system based on student need. Each dimension of the school program provides opportunities for students to improve their lives. These programs are successful because they are run by teachers and street workers who believe that all members of the school community are equal and that each student has the right to decide about his or her own future, a right that includes changing a future that others in society might otherwise determine for them.

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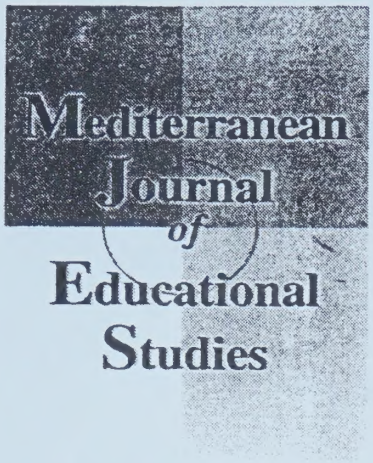

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